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Embodied Film and Experimental Ethnography:  
Place, Belonging and Performative Folk Traditions in England

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## **Abstract**

This research addresses the ways in which film might be used to investigate senses of place and representations of place and ritual. It focuses on two seasonal performative folk traditions in rural England, Haxey Hood in North Lincolnshire and Mayday in Padstow. By considering the experiential qualities of these annual rituals and their significance for local communities as seen in their wider socio-economic contexts, this research raises broader questions regarding place and belonging in contemporary society, and how film as a medium capable of directly conveying phenomenological experience, might transmit the sensual qualities of lived experience, place, and landscape to an audience. Drawing on Sobchack's conception of the film as a body in itself, the role of embodied experience is central in this study in exploring interconnections between the bodies of the filmmaker, the film itself, subjects and audience and their empirical possibilities.

The research at the same time is wary of realist approaches to representation, instead seeking to consider the ways in which this "wild meaning" is then manipulated, fragmented and transformed in the process of filmmaking, both 'in the field' and in the editing process. Through the use of experimental ethnographic methods, key conceptual aspects of this thesis such as performance, the embodied camera and auto-ethnography are used to investigate the complex ways that place and ritual might not only be known and understood, but are also performed and imagined anew through film.

Place and belonging are themes of great contemporary relevance in current academic and art practice, and the outcome of this study has been the creation of my film *Folk in Her Machine* (2013). By exploring both the sensual qualities of lived experience, and other forms of meaning through experimental ethnographic methods, it is argued that fruitful insights have been gained into both the embodied nature of filmic representation and its performative possibilities, or in MacDougall's words, film's interplay "between meaning and being."

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## **Introduction**

This study is a filmic investigation into ritual, place, and belonging, undertaken through a consideration of the embodied inter-relationships between filmmaker, film, subjects and audience in documentary filmmaking.

To address these themes the research explores how embodied and experimental ethnographic approaches might contribute to current understandings of film's potential to convey and question senses of place - how places are sensed, imagined, remembered, created, known and understood, particularly in relation to ritual behaviour.

The research is framed within the context of two performative folk traditions in England in an attempt to interrogate the lived experiences of the annual rituals and their interconnections with broader experiences of local life for these communities. Film is conceived as a medium capable of conveying lived multi-sensory experiences, but also one in which meaning is performed and constructed, and suspicion is maintained surrounding claims to authenticity.

The research draws primarily on literature from the social sciences and film theory. My approach to embodiment has been particularly influenced by anthropologist Tim Ingold and film theorist Vivian Sobchack, who themselves rely heavily on the phenomenological philosophies of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Their work expands upon the premise that it is through the primacy of bodily experience that the world is known and understood, to consider the implications of this for both anthropological research (Ingold and Vergunst, 2008; Ingold, 2005, 2001, 2000), and in conceiving film (Sobchack, 1992).

Ingold combines phenomenological thought with ecological approaches to visual perception to assert that it is through experiential being in the world that it is known and understood. For him this process is ongoing and dynamic, reflecting a close interplay between people and environment in a world that is continually in formation. As Sobchack states, film is a privileged medium, linking directly with this

phenomenological experience in its capacity to express “experience by experience” (this term is borrowed from Merleau-Ponty, 1968, cited in Sobchack, 1992:3). Sobchack conceives of the film as a body in itself, through which a close interrelationship exists between the body of the filmmaker, the film, subjects and audience. While these different types of bodies, organic and technological, are distinctive, they are nonetheless intricately connected. They present certain possibilities for ‘knowing’ the events and localities in this research through shared bodily experiences.

As is now documented and understood, film does not simply capture the world ‘out there’, but has its own distinctive way of seeing, transforming, disrupting and *re-presenting* lived experience. The sensual capacities of film to convey certain experiential qualities of place and ritual will thus be addressed, while at the same time questioning and disrupting this ‘natural’ perception in favour of performative approaches.

As part of a performative investigation, and precisely for the critical potential they contain, experimental ethnographic methods form a central part of this study. These methods are in themselves seen as embodied ones, as they are a means to build upon or fragment lived experience. I tentatively employ anthropologist Catherine Russell’s definition of the term ‘experimental ethnography’ to adopt techniques such as performativity, embodied camerawork and auto-ethnography, as de-centring and distancing strategies. She applies this term in the contexts of social representation in order to highlight and subvert the many problems and politics of representation. These techniques allow for inauthentic and fictional meanings to surface, and reveal the “unknowability” of the experiences of others (1999:25). As with phenomenological approaches, I adopt the term experimental ethnography with some caution, not wishing to sever the work entirely from the lived contexts, social experiences and histories being represented. It is the interplay between drawing close to lived experience through shared tactile experiences, and a pulling away via de-centring and critical strategies that this research explores. Rather than being passively immersed in the image, the audience is invited to form and imagine embodied and critical meanings that might share affinities with, but are distinct from, the real life experiences being presented onscreen.



To briefly introduce the use of the term performative in this research, it is used on many different levels to describe the nature of the traditions themselves, its application, following an anthropological discourse, as a trope to describe the active relationships people have to place and landscape in the creation of meaning, and the performative nature of filmic representation itself. This is then foregrounded and further explored here via experimental ethnographic methods. It is a means through which to view the interrelationship between bodies, places, and landscapes as active and dynamic. This applies to the bodies of subjects, myself as filmmaker, and to the body of the film itself. Performative perspectives are used to explore how people might invest with meaning, remember and imagine place and landscape through active engagement, memory, imagination and representation. The performative folk traditions are seen as active and conscious engagements with place and space, repeated over time, with the capacity to re-affirm connections between people and place. The filmmaker and camera's own movements through the landscape (and the later editing process) are also performative gestures, providing opportunities for new and dynamic ways of inventing, knowing and disrupting space, place and landscape. The writing of myself into the film through auto-ethnographic techniques comprises part of my performative (and experimental ethnographic) approach. This is a process through which my own staged and gendered experiences are inscribed into the work. In particular, I use narrative and fictionalisation to explore the "representation of the self as a performance" (Russell, 1999:276), and to undermine any claims to authenticity.

Mayday in Padstow, Cornwall, and Haxey Hood in Haxey, North Lincolnshire, have been chosen as the focus of the study owing to their distinctive performative qualities, and the wider socio-economic and historical contexts in which these traditions are enacted. These factors help explain the huge significance invested in them by local communities.

In Padstow, on May 1<sup>st</sup> every year, two 'Obby 'Osses, comprising circular black canvas frames with horses' tails with a man in the middle wearing a grotesque mask, whirl their way around the streets of the town throughout the day to the sound of beating drums and accordions. The day is a huge celebration and affirmation of community in Padstow, and an opportunity for 'locals' to re-claim the streets of a town they

perceive as no longer their own, swamped by second home owners and tourists and the influence of the celebrity chef Rick Stein. At the ceremony only those born in the town may wear white, so the relationship between insider and outsider is one fiercely defended and performed on the day.

Haxey Hood comprises a ritual 'game' between the two villages of Haxey and Westwoodside, in which a leather baton is thrown up in the field that divides their territories. It is fought over in the sway, a mass of men aiming to push towards their village pub. Despite the competitive element, outsiders are welcome to join in, and the drawing of boundaries is more subtle than in Padstow. Local knowledge of the landscape, the competitive element and varying levels of inclusion and exclusion in this intensely masculine ritual are still important here, however. This active performance will be viewed as a form of connecting with place, local landscape and community through extreme experience and physicality, set within a former agricultural community, now a middle class dormitory village where youths complain of boredom and community life has declined.

The ritual experiences for locals are framed and considered throughout the research in relation to my own filmmaking. I had to account for my own presence and stance in relation to these places as filmmaker, female and non-local. A reflexive awareness pervades every aspect of my work. Through exploring commonalities and differences of experience, and the performative possibilities these bring about, politics and power-relations are also explored and foregrounded.

To provide an overview of the layout of this written part of the thesis, Chapter 1 will consider in more detail theories of 'senses of place' and embodied experience as a means of understanding and knowing the world, and as a way of conceiving film. Through first introducing ideas surrounding place and belonging, I will consider the general context in which the local has received renewed interest. I will then outline more specifically the conceptual approach of this research that it is through the body and phenomenological lived experience that places are known and understood. These general reflections are then expanded to consider the capacity of filmic representation to convey lived experience. Film itself is also conceived here as a body, and therefore through documentary recording it is argued that a close inter-

relationship exists between the bodies of the filmmaker, film, and subjects, capable of transmitting qualities of lived experience to an audience.

I then introduce the performative stance adopted in this research to consider more specifically the ways in which senses of place and landscape are actively created, imagined and remembered through movement and ritual. Just as relationships between people and place are performed through the rituals, so too are my camera and body seen as performative bodies capable of creating, imagining and disrupting meanings distinct from those of subjects. The use of a performative framework, alongside experimental ethnographic methods such as embodied camera techniques and auto-ethnography are then defined and applied to my work to displace notions of authentic documentary 'truths', and to consider the transformed ways places might be known and understood through embodied filmic experience, distinct from the real life experiences of others. As a final means of framing my research in Chapter One, I draw on examples of other filmic representations that adopt embodied approaches and more generally on other representations of place to locate my own work and develop my argument.

I divide Chapter 2 into three sections to contextualise the rituals and research locations in more detail, and to describe the practical and conceptual methods used to gather materials and make the film. In Part 1 I first expand upon my two primary fieldwork sites and the traditions of Haxey Hood and Mayday. I describe the rituals themselves in more detail, provide brief histories of the events, and outline the broader socio-economic contexts of both locales. I then divide Parts 2 and 3 of this chapter into 'experience' and 'interpretation' to consider, in a manner reminiscent of ethnographic fieldwork, the dialogical relationship between the experiences I recorded during the research period and the subsequent creation of meaning in making the film. I go on to consider the process of collecting materials 'in the field', loosely framed as ethnographic research methods, building upon my ideas and arguments from the previous two chapters, before then discussing the process of interpretation. Experimental ethnographic techniques such as auto-ethnography and fictionalisation are means through which to interpret and disrupt the materials collected in the field, and to reveal new meanings. Performative approaches are thus positioned in dynamic interplay with phenomenological readings of the film in which

I am also interested. In this way the film aims to explore the inter-relations between embodied 'being' or immersion and more critical forms of engagement, between experiences tied to those of subjects and altered bodily experiences of place and ritual based on my own and the audience's backgrounds and histories. These themes saturate the work and are addressed in various ways through the use of voice-over, re-filming ritual sequences, approaches to sound and the editing process.

Finally, in Chapter 3, I shall then position the research in relation to broader conceptions of folklore, ritual and its representation. Firstly, I consider the ways in which British folk traditions and folklore have been historically conceived, understood and written about. I secondly go on to consider the ways they have been represented on film through the last century, in Britain in particular. I site the lack of embodied, reflexive perspectives amongst filmic representations from primarily male points of view (certainly until recently), thereby suggesting my own tactile and reflexive approach as offering new forms of knowing. The discussion is then finally broadened out to consider filmic representations of ritual more generally, discussing examples by filmmakers such as Jean Rouch, Maya Deren and Ben Russell, all of whom in their own ways were or are interested in the possibilities of the medium itself, and reflexive or critical approaches to documentary recording that my own work is influenced by and builds upon.

Given that place and place-making through ritual experience is the central focus of this research, and the filter through which I explore ideas surrounding embodiment and performance in relation to film, I will first now introduce the backdrop of place and belonging as the starting point to develop my arguments in this thesis.

## **Chapter 1: Senses of place, belonging, and embodied filmmaking**

### **Overview**

There are many ways in which people come to understand, express, and form attachments to their homes. A sense of home and belonging is arguably a basic human need, heightened in many places today through their contestation amidst the forces of local and global power relations. While places and localities in reality shift and change, ritual behaviour is one means through which the enduring spirit of a place, a sense stability and continuity, might be created and imagined (following Cohen, 1985, and Relph, 1976:32). The performative folk rituals in this research are thus framed through the senses of place they evoke. They are seen as embodied forms of 'symbolic emplacement' in the landscape (a term borrowed from Williksen and Rapport, 2010:3) and active forms of home-making, that contain significance for those taking part.

This section will frame the research by initially considering recent contributions to academic understandings of place and space, particularly drawing on the fields of cultural geography and anthropology. I will provide a brief overview of some of the key thinking that has developed in these areas, before broadly locating my own field sites and the traditions in relation to them.

The primacy of lived, bodily experience as a means of knowing and understanding the world has emerged as a strong theoretical strand in recent times, and is central to understanding relationships between the body and space, and the ways places are made meaningful. These concepts will then be explored both to consider the sensory experiences of subjects in my chosen localities as they perform the rituals, and to frame my theoretical approach to film.

I develop these ideas further by considering the central notions of performance and movement as means through which bodies actively engage with, remember and imagine places and landscape. I argue that it is through dynamic inter-actions between bodies and places that they are made meaningful. Focusing on performative relationships to places and spaces allows for a recognition of the role of human

agency and imagination in the landscape, but in turn also the performative roles of filmmaker and film as makers of meaning. The world is not simply presented through film, but is transformed, distorted and *re-presented*.

A performative trope opens gaps between the experiences of self and others, foregrounds the role of intervention and encounter, and allows for a multi-layered, critical distancing and fictionalisation in the interpretive process. These ideas are then developed further through a discussion of my research methods and the concept of experimental ethnography. Building upon Catherine Russell's ideas surrounding performance, I include embodied filming techniques, such as tactility, movement and auto-ethnography, as my experimental strategies. Through these techniques I seek to both draw close and pull apart. I aim to present fragments and textures through the research, preferring partial truths over fixed meanings. Just as power relations and broader socio-economic conditions are central factors in exploring the significance of these traditions and what it means to live in a certain community, so too I was closely implicated in these power relations during the research process, for example in my positions as 'outsider'<sup>1</sup> and female at these predominantly local events, and in the politics of representation. The methods I adopt reflect and explore these issues.

Finally, having defined and discussed my research methods, I then provide an overview of films that in various ways have concerned themselves with issues of place, performance and embodied experience. I locate these representations in relation to my own work to further position the conceptual and historical context of my research.

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'outsider' is used in this research as a conscious appropriation of a word used by community members in the two places, but particularly in Padstow, to describe non-locals, or those who have come to live there who they perceive not to be Padstonian. I myself was therefore perceived to be in this category and became acutely aware of this label attributed to me. In reality it is recognized that this term is highly problematic and the boundaries that are put up there to deal with the sense of threat are contradictory and arbitrary. The research continually plays on these ideas to explore both the overlapping and distinctive senses of place and ritual as experienced and performed by myself and subjects, suggesting the complex and constructed nature of identities, and the multiplicity of the self.

## **Place and belonging**

Since the 1990s, there has been renewed interest in issues of place and locality across the social sciences and the arts in considering people's inter-relations with places, and how places shape and are integral to understanding culture.

For cultural geographers these concerns have often been framed in broad humanistic terms and in the contexts of rootedness, uprootedness and transrootedness (see for example Bachelard, 1994; Cosgrove, 1985; Tuan, 1977; Relph, 1976). Reacting to geographies of positivist spatial science, philosophies such as Heidegger's phenomenological ideas on "dwelling" (1977), and social theory were influential in setting out ideas for a world created through human agency rather than a pre-existing framework of geometric relations. Also of prominence in this field has been a trend towards more political concerns, such as the formulation of neo-Marxist cultural critique and global post-modern theories (Harvey, 1990 and Jackson 1989). These are often positioned in relation to geographies of struggle and resistance, particularly with regard to gender (Massey, 1994; Rose, 1993), representation and political action (Williksen and Rapport, 2010; Pile and Thrift, 1995; Keith and Pile, 1993).<sup>2</sup>

In anthropology, many recent theorisations of place have come about as a means to better understand the construction of culture and social identity. They have been particularly concerned with local and global power relations and the world conditions of diasporas, exile and displacement, particularly for indigenous populations and cultural minorities. But in the light of such territorial, identity and power struggles, anthropologists have generally tended towards more specific studies of places as sites of struggle, resistance and contestation, and as a means of giving voice to the "other"<sup>3</sup> (as opposed to through broader humanistic or philosophical enquiry).

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<sup>2</sup> The key emphasis here on power relations and social control contains a strong theoretical link to the previous work of Michel Foucault's spatial analyses (see, for example, Gordon, 1980).

<sup>3</sup> The term "other" is problematic, and generally avoided in this thesis unless quoting source material. While it has mainly been used in cross-cultural and post-colonial contexts by anthropologists, I subscribe to the views of Homi Bhabha, who argues there is a danger inherent to its use in further

Despite these tendencies, micro-studies in anthropology are also often a means through which to extrapolate broader understandings of culture, and to consider inter-relations between micro and macro levels of study. Margaret Rodman, for example, in her essay 'Empowering Place: Multilocality and Multivocality', highlights power relations and assumptions underlying notions of 'place' and 'location', calling instead for more studies incorporating a multiplicity of voices and places (2003). Arjun Appadurai has also been influential in questioning the way anthropologists write about culture focused in just one place (1988). Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson see space as "beyond culture" (1992). And James Clifford conceives of culture as located in the contacts and boundaries in and between places (1997)<sup>4</sup>. These approaches are somewhat indebted to the post-modern thinking of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, (1988) and the context of globalisation.

For feminist geographer Doreen Massey, in the context of an increasingly interconnected world, "the problem with certain conceptions of place is that it seems to require the drawing of boundaries" (1994:152). Places can often come to symbolise "a politically conservative haven" and "risk reinforcing underlying agendas of exclusion and racism" (Massey, 2005: 5-6).

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distancing the subjects of study and underlining power relations, seen as applicable to my work too (Bhabha, 1994: 66-84).

<sup>4</sup> Clifford writes about museums as "contact zones", for example, drawing on a term used by cultural theorist Mary Louise Pratt in 'Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation' (1992). Here he applies this idea to refer to the organising structure of the museum as "a power-charged set of exchanges" (1997:192). Pratt herself uses the term in the context of colonial encounters, "in which people geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality and intractable conflict". She writes these intersecting trajectories have so often been ignored by "diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination". For her, "a 'contact' perspective emphasises how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. [It stresses] co-presence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power" (1992:6-7). This idea of a contact zone is useful in framing my own filmic practice as being the product of encounters and exchange between myself and subjects, and to acknowledge the uneven power relations at work in the creation of meaning through my research.



Despite the need for caution, places still however clearly exist and are important. Massey acknowledges that belonging in place is a basic human need, but needs to be framed on more progressive, open and dynamic terms. For her, places should be seen as both at once global *and* local (1994:146-156). She argues that places are complex entities, in which experiences of space and place vary greatly, for example through gender and race, and are at the same time shaped by forces well beyond their (notional) boundaries. Many commentators have noted that one of the effects of capitalism has been to accentuate rather than erode the distinctiveness of localities, through the uneven distribution of its effects. (Harvey, 1990: 293).

This research thus takes as its starting point a focus on place and its centrality to notions of belonging, locating itself firmly in Haxey and Padstow. It also incorporates London in its scope, with the film beginning and ending there. This is a means to reflexively consider and perform my own position and 'senses of place'. Haxey and Padstow are presented together with footage from London, Paris, and travels between places, to explore inter-connections, boundaries and overlapping experiences, real and imagined, in, through, and between places. In this way, it is recognised "all places are known and understood in relation to others we have been to" (Relph, 1976:29), and that the continual processes of place-making occur through dynamic engagement and movement, both within and between places (Casey, 2009).

While this research focuses primarily on the intimate embodied experiences of subjects, filmmaker, film and audience, awareness is maintained of the broader socio-economic contexts that form the backdrop of these places, and the inter-relations between the local, national and global scales. Many of the perceived problems discussed in interviews and encounters with local residents in Haxey and Padstow, for example, could be analysed in the light of broader socio-economic shifts in recent decades, or perhaps seen as symptomatic in some way of the uneven distribution of capitalism. These themes are suggested at times through voices and images, but not as a means to make fixed claims. The audience is instead left to sense and imagine the multiple resonances that might emanate in, through and between places. An in-depth study of Haxey and Padstow's positioning in relation to the national and global context is beyond the scope of this research. I will nonetheless provide more background discussion of the broader contexts of these localities in Chapter 2.

Again, while in this research the folk traditions themselves as performances of place and identity are considered primarily through lived experience and local perceptions, it is also interesting, in framing the customs, to speculate on the renewed interest in folk traditions as perhaps symptomatic more generally of certain aspects of contemporary life.

Various commentators, for example, have written about the inter-relationship between the effects of capitalism and their impacts on social and cultural trends. Geographer David Harvey noted that the ephemeral nature of much of modern existence due to the effects of time-space compression<sup>5</sup> has brought about precisely an opposing reaction, a greater need to belong and fix meaning. He writes, "The greater the ephemerality the more pressing the need to discover or manufacture some kind of eternal truth that may lie therein" (1990: 292). Harvey sees these trends as manifesting themselves through such cultural patterns as religious revivalism, claims to authenticity, and the renewed emphasis placed on the family and tradition (292).

In a similar process, cultural theorist Patrick Wright sees a kind of nostalgia to Western modernity, "a nostalgia which, while it may indeed be differentiated according to the division of labour, also testifies in more general ways to the destabilisation of everyday life." (1985:20). He also sees it as hardly surprising that old forms of security such as family life and tradition have become more appealing in the current climate.

It was my experiences of first going to Padstow and sensing for myself some of the tensions inherent within that place (a holding on to, performing and re-connecting to an imagined past through the tradition) that first drew my interest into the complexities of place and belonging and what it meant here, the inter-relationships between local and broader conditions, and perhaps the increased need for meaning in a disorientating current climate. In Padstow, performing the tradition is an important means of resisting perceived threats to the community's identity in the face of second homeowners and external forces. In the spirit of Walter Benjamin, who wrote about

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<sup>5</sup> Harvey quotes Lyotard, stating that the temporary contract in everything "becomes the hallmark of postmodern living" (Harvey, 1990: 291).

appropriating the past as the seizing upon a memory “as it flashes up in a moment of danger” (Benjamin in Hamacher, 2005:65), these words seem particularly applicable in the context of Padstow. Re-performing and imagining the past on Mayday becomes a means through which to connect to the present at a time when locals feel threatened.

While in Haxey the backdrop to the tradition is a less tense one, a gradual transition from farming community to commuter village has also brought about changing social structures and certain senses of loss through which the tradition might be contextualised. Both Haxey Hood and Padstow’s Mayday traditions have become increasingly popular in recent years. The local and broader socio-economic contexts are reflected in many ways both within the performances themselves and in the renewed significance they hold for locals, and for those who travel back from elsewhere to take part.

In this light it is also significant that both ritual performances focus around unique and highly cherished ritual objects: the ‘Obby ‘Oss in Padstow and the ‘hood’ in Haxey. Harvey refers to a study undertaken by sociologist Eugene Rochberg-Halton in 1977, who did a sample of North Chicago residents and found that the most valued objects within the home were the ones that embodied memories and social or familial ties. It was surmised that they served to generate “a sense of self that lies outside of the sensory overload of consumerist culture and fashion” (1990:292). In the same way, these traditions in local landscapes employ ritual objects that embody certain values. They have been passed down through generations and form powerful means to remember, to re-affirm senses of place and community, and to find meaning that is outside of the power structures of society<sup>6</sup>.

British social scientists Anthony Cohen and Marilyn Strathern both recognize that belonging in place and the politics of localism operate within the context of broader socio-economic change (Cohen 1987, 1985, 1982; Strathern, 1984). Cohen argues

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<sup>6</sup> While it has long been recognized that ‘place’ and ‘community’ are rarely co-terminous, (Massey, 1994:147), certain senses of place and community are nonetheless performed and re-constituted on these days in these two places.

that ritual is one of the means through which community might symbolically assert its boundaries and express its difference to others. He sees this requirement as intensified at the margins of cultures where the community is perceived as threatened. For him, the more structural boundaries are blurred between one place and another through change, the greater the need arises to create them symbolically (Cohen, 1985:44). In both Padstow and Haxey the erosion of traditional livelihoods and community life, and in the case of Padstow, 'incomers' taking up residence there has likewise arguably led to increased interest and participation in the rituals in recent times, and the need to symbolically assert boundaries. This is suggested, for example, in sociologist Herman Gilligan's research on social and economic change in Padstow. He points out that the term 'insiders' and 'outsiders' have come about precisely *because* new people have come to live within the area, thus blurring boundaries and generating the need to distinguish between themselves and the old residents (1990:173).

Stewart, in her cultural critique of a marginal community in West Virginia, asks us to "imagine a place grown intensely local in the face of loss", and the need to "*re-member*" (1996:16-17). Klein states, "Memory comes to the fore in an age of historiographic crisis precisely because it figures as a therapeutic alternative to historical discourse" (2004 in Pearson, 2006:13). What is interesting about this turning inwards, or the drawing of boundaries, remembering and re-affirming identity through folk traditions or other means seems to be that this mechanism might be *both* reflective on the one hand of a deep Conservatism, resistance to change and exclusion, and on the other, contains within it a radical potential to overturn dominant power structures, to define oneself, and to re-assert identities, real and imagined. The contradictory and complex nature of places and the ways people engage and make claims to them is explored and acknowledged throughout the research process.

To sum up, my approach to place and belonging is one that recognizes that these terms are always politically charged, just as representation too is a political act. Cohen acknowledges that ritual's capacity to bring about heightened consciousness is one of the reasons it is a powerful symbolic device (Cohen, 1985:50). But for him, as with Strathern, the physical locality is treated as a "passive setting for relational

matrix among people” (Grey, 2003: 255-6, referring to Rodman’s ideas, 1992). I am instead interested in exploring the nature, texture and performed qualities of these experiences. The rituals also become a means to consider the intersecting and inter-subjective experiences of subjects, filmmaker, film and audience. It is with this emphasis in mind that I move on to the embodied, sensory and performative approach taken in this research.

### **Senses of place, embodiment and film**

Alongside the renewed recognition of the importance of place and locality in contemporary discourse, there has also been a strong theoretical turn towards the primacy of the body and embodied experience as the nexus through which the world is known, actively created, and understood. This position informs and influences how place and ritual are conceived and approached in this research.

Many ethnographers and geographers have turned to considering the sensual aspects of place-making: how people create and inhabit places and how they may come to form attachments to and know them through multi-sensory, bodily experience. This perspective has come to the forefront in issues of space and place in the social sciences since the 1990s (see Gieseeking et al., 2013; Casey, 2009, 1996; Classen, 2005; Howes, 2005; Gray, 2003; Low and Lawrence-Zuniga, 2003; Rodman, 2003; Stoller, 1997; Feld and Basso, 1996; Hirsh and O’Hanlan 1995; Tilley, 1994; Bender, 1993).

In ‘The Anthropology of Space and Place’, Setha Low and Denise Lawrence-Zuniga describe the concept of ‘embodied space’, which “underscores the importance of the body as a physical and biological entity, as lived experience, and as a centre of agency, a location for speaking and acting on the world.” (2003:2) The ‘body’ here will be defined using anthropologist Thomas Csordas’ encompassing of both its biological and social characteristics, and ‘embodiment’ as an “indeterminate methodological field defined by perceptual experience and mode of presence and engagement in the world” (1994, cited in Low and Lawrence-Zuniga, 2003:2).

Basso uses the term ‘senses of place’ to describe “the experiential and expressive ways places are known, imagined, yearned for, held, remembered, voiced, lived,

contested and struggled over; and the multiple ways places are metonymically and metaphorically tied to identities.” (Feld and Basso, 1996:11). Chinese poet Yang Lian describes his own highly personal investigations into landscape as a kind of archaeology of the present, in which meaning is layered in space, but also through which associations and memories from elsewhere surface and intersect (in Sinclair, 2010:23). This research likewise considers the multiple and complex meanings that emanate through the body and in space, for subjects performing the rituals, and through the bodies of the film and filmmaker.

The emphasis on the primordial qualities of embodied experience is particularly influenced in this study by the phenomenological philosophies of Maurice Merleau-Ponty for whom it is through experiential ‘being-in the world’ (influenced by Heidegger’s concept of dwelling) that it is known and understood. Anthropologist Tim Ingold develops these ideas influenced also by biological theories of perception to see humans as existing in a continuum with the physical world through which the body is an organism existing within systems of ecological relations, as well as within systems of social relations. For him the challenge is in understanding the ‘reciprocal interplay’ between these two, in a dynamic, “always unfolding” world that is in “continuous formation.” (2005:103-4).

These ideas provide an important framework for exploring the ways in which places are known and understood, the emphasis being on the entangled and dynamic interrelationships between self and world, and embodied experience as the foundation for knowledge. Just as people come to know and understand their environments and the world through lived experience, so it follows that to attempt to understand (and form a critical dialogue with) these experiences requires a foregrounding of my own bodily experience and that of the body of the film. Together they comprise the means through which the sensual qualities of ‘being there’ at the events is conveyed to an audience. As anthropologist David MacDougall and many others have understood, “meaning is produced by our whole bodies, not just conscious thought” (2006:3).

Film theorist Vivian Sobchack, in her influential publication ‘The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience’, (1992) describes film as a privileged medium

above other art forms, in its ability to see, hear and move (12). She recognizes the suitability of phenomenological thought in theorising film due to the close parallels that exist between lived bodily experience and film experience. Building on Merleau-Ponty's central premise that the whole of philosophy comprises "a wild meaning, an expression of experience by experience" (1968, cited in Sobchack 1992:3), she argues that film too works in a similar way. It is an expression of experience by experience, a form of 'wild' communication "that precedes and provides the grounds for secondary significations" (4).

Just as for Merleau-Ponty "the living exchange of perception and expression...[is] born not abstractly but concretely from the surface contact, the fleshy dialogue, of human beings and the world together making sense sensible", so too for Sobchack film comprises a primordial form of perception and expression (cited in Sobchack 1992:3).

She writes, "Cinema thus transposes, without completely transforming, those modes of being alive and consciously embodied in the world that count for each of us as a *direct* experience: as experience 'centred' in that particular, situated, and solely occupied existence sensed first as 'Here, where the world touches' and then as 'Here, where the world is sensible; here, where I am.'" (Sobchack, 1992: 4, quoting Merleau-Ponty, 1968).

Sobchack states film's existence "comes into being (becomes) as an ongoing and unified (if always self-displacing) situation of perception and expression that *coheres* in relation to the world of which it is a material part, but in which it is also materially and diacritically differentiated" (1992: 12).

For Sobchack, the material presence of film itself is a body. It performs similar ontological functions to the lived-body, "in its presence and activity of perception and expression", in which it not only represents or reflects on the filmmaker's approaches but "transcends" these intentions "to constitute and locate its own address, its own perceptual and expressive experience of becoming and being." (9). It is due to the possibilities film offers independent of the bodies of the filmmaker or spectator that Sobchack describes film as "embodied" in its own right (162-3). The body of the film

then forms part of a dynamic interplay between the bodies of the filmmaker, subjects and audience in the transmission of experience and meaning.

These assertions have important implications for methodological approaches, and the presentation of work to an audience, who is also bound up in this relationship through their own bodily engagements with the image. For their relationship importantly involves active and sensual experience too in making sense of and responding to the image, in what Sobchack terms as a dynamic and 'directionally reversible' (1992:5) relationship, where "the act of viewing as the commutation of perception and expression is both an intrasubjective and intersubjective performance equally performable by filmmaker, film and spectator" (21). Cinema's great potential is that it "quite concretely returns us to our senses" (13).

Those who in recent years have advocated a phenomenological approach have noted that in the history of film attention to the embodied and primordial qualities of the medium prior to analysis and reduction into aesthetic, psychoanalytic and political theory has been almost entirely absent (Rutherford, 2002; Sobchack, 1992: 14). These concepts centred on skin and tactility have meant an increased emphasis on the body in the relation between the screen and spectator than previous theories (Chamarette, 2012; Elsaesser and Hagener, 2010; Barker, 2009; Shaw, 2008; MacDougall, 2006; Marks, 2000 and 1998; Lant, 1995; Shaviro, 1993). For film theorist Anne Rutherford, film theory and critical writings largely evoke dismemberment rather than living bodies. She sees the problem as stemming from the invention of the medium and the erroneous understanding of the camera's vision as an extension of the eye. These readings have not taken into account the eye's interconnections with the other senses, a view shared by MacDougall (2006). Ignoring film's ability for example, to touch and feel, conceals "the sensuous potential of discourse and its affective power" (Rutherford, 2002<sup>7</sup>).

Film has always inherently contained this "wild meaning". I borrow here from Merleau-Ponty's term (1968:155), summarised by Sobchack as "the pervasive and as yet undifferentiated significance of existence as it is lived rather than reflected upon"

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<sup>7</sup> [www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/03/25/embodied\\_affect.html](http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/03/25/embodied_affect.html). Last accessed 10.01.13.



(1992:11). Despite this then, it is only recently that the phenomenological qualities of the medium are having a significant impact in current theory, and in line with wider academic thinking in anthropology and many other disciplines. It is then these parallel and interconnecting concerns, between the humanities and film, that is of interest in this investigation both in terms of approaching and conceiving an empirical ethnographic investigation, and in conceptualising the presences of filmmaker and camera as primarily embodied too.

Before going on to explore in more detail the ontological and empirical possibilities of film in this research, both as a form of primary or “wild” communication, and as performative medium, I will provide an overview of some of the key criticisms that have been targeted at phenomenological approaches both in general and when applied to film.

When considering phenomenological approaches in general terms, some of the most persistent problems theorists have encountered have been the privileging of ‘natural’ perception, and an over-emphasis on individual bodily experience at the expense of broader socio-political concerns.

Within geographical discourse for example, some critics from Marxist and radical traditions are wary that the prioritisation of the perceptions of the individual has often been at the expense of broader social, economic, historical and political contexts through which they believe that individuality is shaped and determined. Feminist cultural geographer Catherine Nash believes phenomenology is in danger of retreating from feminism and the politics of the body “in favour of the individualistic and universalizing sovereign subject” (2000, in Wylie, 2007: 181).

Another key criticism has been that of romanticism. By searching for ‘natural’ perception and “wild” meaning the implication is that people’s connections with the world have been lost in the modern world, with phenomenology comprising a search for something more authentic (Wylie, 181). Merleau-Ponty, in his introduction to the 1963 edition of ‘The Phenomenology of Perception’ argues that, “all of its efforts are directed towards re-establishing a direct and primitive contact with the world” (in Wylie, 2007:181). The word ‘primitive’ immediately suggests an idealism at work,

locating this elsewhere in the past, in the pre-modern or the non-Western (181), which is clearly dangerous.

Anthropologists have also expressed similar doubts, particularly with regard to ethnography's emphasis on bodily experience as a means to understand others. Terms such as the body and what bodily experience constitutes are contested issues and problematic to define. Sarah Pink (2006:47) for instance, shares a concern with many others that modes of being in the world are influenced by both individual and culturally constituted factors. Different meanings are generated through the senses for different people, making it very difficult to understand them from the outside.

Structuralist and post-structuralist thinkers have also largely been anti-phenomenological in their thought. Writers such as Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, and Michel Foucault would refute the idea of a 'natural' perceiving subject, attacking phenomenology's central notions of "presence, perception and subjectivity" in favour of broader linguistic, symbolic and discursive structures. (Wylie, 2007: 184).

In applying phenomenological theories to film, similar criticisms have surfaced, particularly in the over-emphasis on experience at the expense of interpretative processes. Film theorists Elsaesser and Hagener express caution at over-simplification or over-identification, acknowledging there are still contradictions and problems with this recent paradigm (2010: 115). Deleuze also criticises existential phenomenology for privileging 'natural perception'. For him all cinematographic movement is constructed and therefore unfaithful to experiences of the real world (Deleuze, 1995:57).

The trend in contemporary art for ethnographic approaches that foreground the experience of the artist has also been seen as problematic. Art theorist Hal Foster noted in his influential essay 'The Artist as Ethnographer' that ethnographic approaches have often been adopted at superficial levels and with insufficient criticality (1996:171-203). Similarly, Miwon Kwon, in assessing the ethnographic turn in art (in this case referring to performance and installation art), provides the examples of Nikki L. Lee, whose method involves spending time with communities and assuming their identities, and Lan Tuazon, who in *The Anthropologists Table* laid

out fieldwork objects (2001:74-89). Both artists assert the impossibility of unmediated experience or knowledge. For Kwon they address individual elements of ethnography but highlight the lack of art practice that considers both experience *and* its interpretation as crucial dialogical elements that cannot be isolated from each other (87)<sup>8</sup>.

Recent trends in contemporary art have also seen an increasing number of exhibitions that have explored the multi-sensory potential of the gallery space by playing with ideas of scale and sound. These aim to transmit the experiential qualities of film to the audience through, for example large scale images designed to envelop and immerse the audience. Foster, however, is highly critical of this type of “spectacle”. For example, in artist Bill Viola’s *Five Angels for the Millenium* (2001), the viewer is almost invited to merge with the image in what he describes as a kind of “techno-sublime” or “bewitching mysticism” (Foster, cited in Leighton, 2008:34). While the role of sensory experience might be fore-grounded, it here encourages audience passivity rather than critical awareness or political context.

In response to these criticisms and in locating my own work, I return to the goals of this thesis that are to explore the interplay between, on the one hand, a drawing close to the world through lived bodily experience, and on the other, to explore other significations that emerge through performative and experimental ethnographic approaches.

While some critics have expressed concern about phenomenology’s foregrounding of ‘natural’ perception, Merleau-Ponty’s later writing argues that this stance can still be dialectical and dialogical (Sobchack, 1992:30). That embodied experiences are informed by cultural factors is “implicit” in Merleau-Ponty’s theories, according to

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<sup>8</sup> For other examples of artists adopting ethnographic methods in their work, see Gillian Wearing’s *Drunk* (2000). This film was the product of two years spent with her alcoholic subjects. Through placing this group of people in a whitewashed space to film them, the interplay between authenticity and artifice is an important element in her work. Lothar Baumgarten spent eighteen months with two Yanomami tribes in the Amazonian region before showing his footage and other materials in a gallery context (see for example, *Origin of the Night: Amazon Cosmos*, 1973-77). Again, caution should be expressed in asserting that these (pseudo)ethnographic approaches validate the work, and their eventual screenings in gallery contexts highlights processes of power at work in the production of art.

Marks (2000:152), thereby implying that perception is never 'natural'. In the specific context of film, Sobchack recognises that the audience are never simply presented with raw or "wild" experience. Film in this way both "presents and re-presents, resembles and reassembles; it is both a vision of the world and the world visualising" (Shaw, 2008: 61).

My aim is then through the sensory qualities of the medium in my research to provide opportunities for an audience to sense and imagine the places and rituals being represented. At the same time, it highlights and explores the transformations involved in the process of filmmaking. Experience is constantly set up in a dialogical relationship with interpretative processes.

While I am interested in the "wild" qualities of filmic experience that come to the fore at certain points in my film, as will be discussed later, the audience are never allowed to lose themselves entirely in passive 'immersive' experience. Instead I continually address the socio-economic contexts of the communities being represented and the politics of representation. This is achieved both through the film's structure, which deals with broader contexts of place and gives voice to participants in the rituals, and through experimental ethnographic methods. While more traditional phenomenologists such as Ingold have been seen by some as insufficiently critical (Wylie, 2007: 181) I do not believe phenomenological theories are necessarily so when applied more broadly. Many cultural geographical theorisations of place and landscape influenced by phenomenology that I draw upon, for example, see places and landscapes as expressions of cultural, economic and political power (see Cresswell, 2004; Bender, 2001; Pile and Thrift, 1995; Keith and Pile, 1993). My approach requires ritual experience to be contextualised, and a recognition too that bodily experiences are socially and culturally influenced.

While Catherine Nash, amongst others, sees phenomenology as in danger of retreating away from feminism, there are other feminist thinkers who have conceived of these philosophies applied to film on entirely different terms. Feminist film theorists such as Laura Marks (2000, 1998) and Jennifer Barker (2009), in contrast, have instead influentially conceived of embodied approaches as potential feminist strategies, capable of disrupting and sidestepping cinematic conventions. Through

certain embodied techniques such as tactile and intimate camerawork, and foregrounding the sensual texture of the film's surface, they see film as capable of actively stepping away from masterful forms of representation and creating new meanings. In this context embodied filmmaking becomes a form of empowerment, motivated by an awareness of the politics of image-making. This stance is more in line with my own research, identifying with the critical potential of a phenomenological approach. Through filming, I am actively involved in creation of meaning, just as performing rituals is an active form of meaning and place-making for participants.

The creation of meaning through certain embodied filmmaking techniques in this research is not solely influenced by these feminist thinkers, but more broadly too. As Rose states, conceiving of identity as fragmented (and following Butler, performed), is not just a question of gender, but also race, class, and other factors (1995:333). The role of bodily experience as the vehicle through which certain power structures can be overturned was also influenced, for example, by social scientist Michel de Certeau's writings in which walking in the city is seen as a means of resisting the forces that shaped the city environment (1998), a point to which I shall return.

While the lived body, bodily practice and film's body are central to this research, as will be explored more in the next section, I also draw on other theoretical fields too that are not necessarily informed by phenomenological thought<sup>9</sup>. My application of the terms performative and experimental ethnography, for example, incorporates insights from the field of performance studies, the writings of feminist philosopher Judith Butler, and the work of Catherine Russell<sup>10</sup>. Again, I want to re-iterate the embodied and dialogical interplay different approaches might provide in my research. The body provides the basis for performative and imaginative explorations

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<sup>9</sup> It is worth noting here that both Marks and Sobchack themselves are not solely indebted to phenomenological thought. Their work at times refers to, for example, Deleuze's (seemingly opposing) philosophy of time in their understanding of the temporality of cinema. However, they foreground the (un-Deleuzian) idea of the perceiving subject, Deleuze instead seeing images as "an immanent plane without a perceiving subject" (Elsaesser and Hagener, 2010:125).

<sup>10</sup> Despite Judith Butler not being directly influenced by phenomenology, she does explore how her theories asserting that identity comprises 'stylized acts' (to be discussed later in my thesis) connect with certain more radical interpretations of this philosophy. She takes Merleau Ponty's conceptions of the body as a "set of possibilities to be continually realized" (Butler, 1988: 521) and critically assesses its application and relevance for feminist re-constructions of the body and gender (1988).

of representational processes, and the experiences of place and ritual are themselves channeled through the body and are the product of these experiences. Experimental and performative techniques then build upon, fragment and disrupt these encounters.

In this chapter I have so far provided the general context of place, defined my uses of the terms senses of place, phenomenology and embodiment in this research. I have then applied these ideas to film to consider the ways in which film might convey and transform these lived experiences of ritual and place to an audience.

In the next section I will now turn to defining and considering the performative and experimental ethnographic approaches I have adopted in this research. I will first draw on ideas from the social sciences to consider the folk traditions themselves as active forms of engagement and emplacement within places and landscapes through bodily performance. Then I will extend these ideas to consider the performative nature of filmmaking, and the ways this approach might be used to consider the new meanings that emerge through presenting and *re*-presenting place and ritual to an audience. Included in my discussion of the performative I will introduce the term experimental ethnography to frame the methods I have used, and to highlight performance, embodied filming, and auto-ethnography as means both to de-centre and to create “serious fictions” (Clifford, 1988: 10<sup>11</sup>).

## **Performing place and ritual**

The term performative is used in this research to mean the inter-subjective ways through which bodily experiences and identities are lived, created, expressed and imagined. This term has been appropriated widely in the social sciences since the 1970’s (see for example Williksen and Rapport, 2010; Ingold and Vergunst, 2008;

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<sup>11</sup> Clifford employs this term to refer the writing of ethnographic texts, which come about through exchanges that occur through research in politically charged situations. He writes, “The subjectivities produced in these often unequal exchanges-whether of ‘natives’ or of visiting participant-observers-are constructed domains of truth, serious fictions.” Once this fictionalisation is recognized, he believes diverse inventive possibilities emerge for postcolonial ethnographic representation. (1988:10). This term is seen as equally applicable in this research context.

Olwig, 2008; Wylie, 2007; Low and Lawrence-Zuniga, 2003; Feld and Basso, 1996; Beeman, 1993; Turner, 1988, 1982, 1974). In its foregrounding of the lived body and bodily practice, concepts of embodiment are central. The field of performance studies has been particularly key in shaping these understandings. Just as the notion of performance in theatre implies acting a role, so too here the term allows for a recognition of the self and lived experience as multiple, shifting and part of a continually unfolding process, rather than as an authentic or fixed entity.

This perspective opens gaps for multiple truths and fictionalisation in the creation of meaning. These ideas are related to every part of this research, from people's ritual behaviour in the landscape, to my own 'performed' identity and use of the camera 'in the field', to the use of narrative in the edit. When the term performative is used in the social sciences, it primarily refers to the role of human agency in the creation of meaning. In this research I also use the term in relation to film to explore the performative possibilities of the medium's technological body too, and its inter-relations with the bodies of subjects, filmmaker and audience.

Additional to these conceptions of performance borrowed from anthropology and theatre, I am influenced too by Judith Butler's seminal ideas in 'Gender Trouble', and Russell's use of the term performative as an experimental ethnographic technique. Butler explores performance in relation to gender in her belief that identity is always a performed act, with no 'natural' underlying self. I have already briefly defined Russell's ideas on experimental ethnography, in which the notion of performance plays a central part. Both of these concepts will be discussed in detail at a later point in relation to my filmmaking methods.

A focus on the dynamic, ever shifting relationship between self, camera and the world in which meaning is constantly being created and re-imagined is central to this study as it explores the ways in which places and landscapes are known through everyday life and through repeated performative ritual experience, and in turn also through their representation. The ways in which everyday life is experienced, and in the context of broader socio-political factors, impacts upon the meaning and significance of the rituals, and likewise the ritual experience is one that feeds back to experiences of space and place in daily lives for local communities. By focusing on the interplay

between ritual experience, wider senses of place and their representation, this allows for insight into the “lived experience of the land”, and “the interrelationship of performance and the everyday, and of the entangled nature of land, human subject and event”. (Pearson, 2006:4). It also allows for a consideration of the entangled nature of film, filmmaker and audience in this process too.

Before considering film any further, I want to first explore the active ways in which places are engaged with through lived bodily practice and performance. I am particularly interested in the various gestures and movements through which people interact with their environments and in which they are made meaningful. Movement in particular suggests process, partiality and the “*in-betweenness*” of my own, my camera, and subjects’ encounters with place and space<sup>12</sup>. As art theorist Peggy Phelan writes, “to be alive is to move, to be continually decentred, never quite arriving, never quite leaving, but taut within the pull of each desire.” (2010:29).

Various commentators in the social sciences have focused specifically on movement, and the ways in which places are made and remembered through dynamic engagement within the landscape. (Ingold, 2011, 2007, 2000; Casey, 2009; Ingold and Vergunst, 2008; Olwig, 2008; Grey, 2003; Munn, 2003; Low and Lawrence-Zuniga, 2003; Bender, 2001). Ingold describes how through moving through places, we form a kind of communion with them. Through these repeated experiences, akin to ‘wayfinding’ one situates oneself within the context of journeys previously made, and they become familiar and significant through repetition. Being in and perceiving landscape is thus “to carry out an act of remembrance” (2000:189).

That repeated acts in the landscape might comprise forms of place-making was the basis of anthropologist John Grey’s study into the daily practices of sheep farmers on hill farms in the Scottish borders. (2003). He considers his subjects’ repeated

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<sup>12</sup> I borrow this reference to the ‘*in-betweenness*’ of (filmic) encounters from film theorist Jenny Chamarette in her discussion of phenomenology and film. Film, she writes, is both an object to be regarded, as a contextual and cultural event, and also an intersubjective experience. Both of these speak of in-betweenness for her, “of flesh and contact between viewer and viewed, seer and seen”. She believes none of these elements are separable from each other, or indeed the larger temporal, historical, political, and spatial structures that might be described as cinema (2012:3).



journeys in the hills as a means through which sensual and intimate attachments are formed, in which shepherds come to feel “at home in the hills”.

But the actions of these hill farmers, like those of my subjects in this research, and my own and my camera’s movements in the landscape, are not just means of remembering or repeating the past. Each performance or movement in the landscape, whether acted out intentionally or unconsciously, also generates its own unique meanings in space and time (following critical theorist Elin Diamond’s ideas on performativity, 1996:1). They form part of a dynamic, shifting relationship between bodies and a world in continual formation.

In the case of Haxey Hood and Mayday in Padstow, it is through these ritual experiences that I argue that important senses of place and belonging are created, imagined and remembered for local communities. At these times, the streets and landscapes in the two places are transformed, and ways of being in, acting and moving in the landscape are distinct from everyday life. They are a means to connect to the past, but also continually generate new meanings in the present.

For cultural geographer Dennis Cosgrove, these kinds of performative practices comprise particular opportunities to consider the interplay between “nature, culture and imagination within a spatial manifold” (Cosgrove 2004, cited in Pearson, 2006:3). Tuan uses the term ‘topophilia’ to describe “human beings’ affective ties with the material environment”, and argues these might be formed through physical intimacy or material dependence on the land (1974:96), but also specifically through emotionally charged events (1974: 93). In a more recent publication, geographers Solrun Williksen and Nigel Rapport (2010) consider various techniques through which senses of home are assured in the context of globalization. Folk rituals comprise one example of these “acts of symbolic emplacements in landscapes”, that come about through ongoing and dynamic processes.

A key question is then what particular modes of ‘being’ performative and participatory action enact or bring about; the nature and texture of these sensual experiences, how the world might be subsequently ‘known’ at this time in heightened or distinctive ways, and how important senses of place and belonging may be imagined, remembered and re-created by local communities in this way (before later

considering how this intersects with the filmmaker, and in turn audience's, embodied and performed experiences of the rituals).

Many anthropologists have speculated about the nature of ritual experience and its purpose for participants. Maurice Bloch, for example, used the term "illocutionary force" to describe the cumulative affective powers of song, dance and ritual speech (1989:31). For him ritual can only to be understood by the combined experiential impact of all its sensory elements, which together form more than the rational sum of its parts when broken down into individual units of analysis. Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's concept of 'flow' (1975), suggests that collective ritual is one of the ways this state of being can be achieved, through which the 'actor' experiences a "unified flowing from one moment to the next, in which he is in control of his actions, and in which there is little distinction between self and environment, between stimulus and response, or between past, present, and future." (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975: 36). According to these thinkers, ritual can bring about a merging of action, awareness and surroundings. Arguably, through heightened and engaged bodily experience and emotion, strong bonds and connections are formed and re-affirmed both socially and between people and local landscapes. For geographer David Seamon, it is immersion in the world that is the "primal core of dwelling" and feeling at home (1979:162), and ritual experience offers particular opportunities for these forms of deep connection.

This focus on ritual experience enables a consideration of what ritual actually 'does', rather than what it is supposed to mean. Anthropologists have been particularly influenced by performance studies in this area. Max Gluckman saw rituals as having a therapeutic effect (in Bell, 1997:38), and these ideas were built upon by Victor Turner (1988, 1982), who described ritual in terms of "social drama". He refers to the ways stresses and tensions in the social system are worked out through the inversion of norms during this time (anti-structural and anti-temporal). The social system is dramatised, and social equilibrium is restored once completed. Ritual here serves to maintain the unity of the group. However, it is also a process of re-creating this unity, rather than just affirming it. Through ritual experience, the community is thus continually redefining and renewing itself.

Both Turner and performance theorist Richard Schechner (2003) also use the notion of 'frames'<sup>13</sup> to describe the relationship between performance and the real world: within these frames, actions are governed by a different set of rules from those in everyday life. They mark ritual as a transitional period through which boundaries are created, both between participants and non-participants, and between ritual and non-ritual experience.

While identifying with the therapeutic role of the rituals and the creation of boundaries at these times, I do not wish to suggest that these performances unproblematically unite the community on these days. I am instead interested in the multiple meanings, personal and collective, that emanate in and through the rituals. These might involve both moments of immersion and more conscious or intentional acts in the landscape. Additionally, tensions form as much a part of the events, especially in Padstow, as senses of unity. Likewise, the filming of the rituals highlights both the possibilities for exploring sensual connections and moments of immersion, while at the same time highlighting the problems and tensions of representation.

To sum up, art critic Lucy Lippard sees place as a "layered location replete with human histories and memories, place has width as well as depth. It is about connections, what surrounds it, what formed it, what happened there, what will happen there." (1997:7) The active and reciprocal interplay between people and place is then further complicated and layered with meaning by now taking these general theories and understandings of people and place, and then extending and applying them more specifically to a reflexive consideration of the role of the camera and filmmaker in the creation of meaning. Just as local subjects perform, imagine and create relationships to the world, so too my film performs, imagines and transforms.

Before going on to explore my performative approach to the film in the next section, I want first to problematise this notion and highlight some of the contradictions that surface through adopting this approach. For in conceiving of film as a performative practice and using it as a framework to study performative folk ritual, power is transferred from the locals who enact their traditions to myself as filmmaker. Peggy

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<sup>13</sup> This term was originally employed by anthropologist Gregory Bateson (1955) to describe the contexts in which interaction takes place.

Phelan sees the critical power of performance art as residing in its ephemerality. She describes performance as not easily fitting in to the 'economy of reproduction' of the contemporary art-world. For her, "performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations: once it does so it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology." (1993:146). This research employs a broader definition of performance than the one conceived by Phelan. I see filmmaking itself as a performative act. However, comparisons could be made between performative art as described by Phelan, and the folk customs I recorded. They too are ephemeral acts in the landscape, in which meaning is made in those moments. Their power for locals lies in their non-commercial natures, their uniqueness, and the fact that locals maintain control over their events. Through my filmmaking I document, record, reproduce and add new meanings to these acts, and am later credited with the creation of the work. As film curator William Fowler pointed out, folk traditions are collective acts in which authorship, on the other hand, is not considered important (2010:21). I would however argue at the same time that it is precisely through also using a performative framework to conceive of the process of filmmaking that I too am able to retain a critical stance and deny mastery. Through tentative voiceover, fragmentation and experimentation, my film transforms reality and therefore does not make claims to fixed truths. The work is also not intended for screening in commercial contexts, so will not enter into the cycle that Phelan expresses wariness towards. As a final point, I agree with Phelan that performance's only life is in the present, but as filmmaking too is a performative act, each time the work is screened, new experiences in the present emerge, ones inter-subjectively connecting the bodies of film, subjects and audience in those moments. In these ways, to some extent boundaries are broken down between author, subjects and audience, and notions of ownership or authorship become arbitrary. New embodied readings of the work are created and performed in a continually unfolding world.

It is with the critical potential of performative approaches in mind that I now turn to explore this term further and expand its application within the context of the filmmaking methods I used. I broadly term my methods experimental ethnography,

and include within that framework performance, embodied camerawork and auto-ethnography, all of which inform my research.

### **Embodied filming and experimental ethnography as research methods**

I have so far suggested that the inter-relations between people, place and ritual might be conveyed and understood through considering people's bodily interactions with their environments such as through movement, performance and gesture, and the multi-sensory textures of daily and ritual experience. These assertions were developed by drawing on phenomenological theory, and through focusing on embodied experience. According to this perspective the world is known and understood through lived experience. From the outset, I have offset claims to authenticity by highlighting a performative approach to experience to help understand the inter-relations between people and place as continually in-formation, and to highlight the way places are created and imagined through dynamic processes rather than containing any fixed meanings. Performing the rituals in the context of this research is also seen to contain a political dimension, a means through which people actively re-appropriate, connect to, and remember local places and landscapes during these annual events.

I now want to build on and expand these perspectives and to develop ideas related to film as an embodied and performative research practice. The use of the term performative with reference to both documentary film and ethnographic fieldwork has also become common in recent years<sup>14</sup>. My film addresses certain aspects of social realities and the potential for their transmission through embodied approaches and my own lived bodily experiences in Haxey and Padstow. But the aim is equally to foreground the fictional and performative nature of filmic representation, and to explore the possibilities of experimental ethnography.

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<sup>14</sup> see for example Chanan (2008); Nacify, (2001); Bruzzi, (2000); Schechner and Appel, (1990).

In this section I first provide a general overview and definition of experimental ethnography before exploring in more detail certain approaches used in my research such as embodied filming techniques, camera movement, and auto-ethnography.

In her seminal book on the subject, Russell describes experimental ethnography as a method through which formal experimentation is brought to bear on social representation. She states, "The failure of realism to present evidence of the real is the radical possibility of experimental ethnography" (1999:25). The alternative approach to documentary film she proposes provides a channel through which "different histories" might be explored (1999:5, quoting Clifford, 1986)<sup>15</sup>. She sees one of the ways these might be expressed via experimental ethnography is through the creation of new forms of subjectivity such as auto-ethnographies (5). Experimental ethnography becomes a useful framework for criticising concepts of authenticity. It also serves to highlight the politics of representation, and explore the relationship between experience and interpretation. She considers distancing and decentring strategies such as performativity, reflexivity and fictionalisation as means through which problems inherent in so many forms of cultural representation, such as racism, sexism and imperialism, might be addressed and subverted<sup>16</sup>. She proposes that these "different histories" might also be explored through an understanding of allegory that "sees history as a series of disparate moments that have no 'necessary' relation, progressive or otherwise". (5-6) Ethnographic allegory seen in this way evokes culture through "fragmentation, appropriation and inter-textuality" (6). Embracing the salvage paradigm in this way "implies a foregrounding of the 'time machine' of anthropological representation, a discursive production of the Other that may construct an Edenic, pastoral, authentic site of otherness, but only as a fantasy." (6).

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<sup>15</sup> Russell here builds on Clifford's assertion that "opening ourselves to different histories", is a means to resist the salvage paradigm that ethnographic practice is entangled with, and the problematic assumption that something essential is lost when a culture becomes ethnographic. To resist the salvage paradigm in this way does not require abandoning the allegorical structure of ethnography altogether, but rather engaging with it in different ways (1999:5).

<sup>16</sup> These issues have been addressed by many others, such as Nacify (2001) and Bruzzi (2000).

This film adopts these ideas both in the collection of audio-visual materials ‘in the field’ through certain camera techniques and strategies<sup>17</sup>, and by later inscribing my own experience into the film through the perspective of a fictional female narrator. Through further manipulations, such as re-filming techniques and the use of editing and sound, my approach distorts, fragments and pulls apart documentary truths. Subjects and places in the film are de-familiarised or called into question. Russell writes, “the uncanniness of the Other in representation is the knowledge of its unknowability, the knowledge that to see is not, after all, to know. From that unknowability unfolds a resistance in and of representation.” (1999:25).

Again I want to express some caution towards Russell’s assertions that the ‘other’ exists simply as a “fantasy”, and re-iterate my research approach that addresses the interplay between, on the one hand drawing close, and the other, pulling apart and fragmenting. I believe that through documentary representation certain insights regarding the experiences of others, real lived social experiences and histories can be gained. But a drawing close to the world within my film through embodied experience must then be presented in such a way that the audience is not simply immersed but must reach out, actively form their own embodied meanings, and engage with the politics of place and representation.

That embodied approaches influenced by phenomenology in themselves contain potential to be critical and disruptive has been recognised by certain contemporary feminist cultural thinkers such as Marks (1998) and Barker (2009). They have interpreted embodied and tactile approaches to filmmaking as a means to explore the interplays between visual and bodily forms of perception, as well as conscious and subconscious ways of knowing. These approaches for them importantly deny any mastery over the image or fixed meanings, and have been strongly influential in my own work. While these theories are not specifically written about in the context of experimental ethnography, I adapt and conceive of them as strategies for my own research. For their discussions of performative and embodied camerawork as strategies to intent on disrupting realist representation fit closely with the concerns of experimental ethnography. The feminist embodied approaches and readings of film

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<sup>17</sup> I will explore the notion of fieldwork, fieldwork sites, and the ambiguity of these terms in Chapter 2.

conceived by Marks and Barker also seek to fragment. Through emphasising the bodily presences of filmmaker, film, and audience in the creation of meaning they also highlight the “unknowability” of the experiences of others and the construction of meaning through filmic presence rather than any external reality.

For Marks, haptic perception can be defined as a combination of tactile, kinaesthetic and proprioceptive functions. It is “the way we experience touch both on the surface of and inside our bodies” (1998:332). The eyes function “like organs of touch”, and involve other forms of sensory experience, through which the whole body is engaged. For Marks thinking of cinema as haptic does not so much invite identification with a figure as much as encourage a bodily relationship between the viewer and video image (332). Both Marks and Barker are strongly influenced by Vivian Sobchack’s interpretations of Merleau-Ponty. They borrow the philosopher’s term ‘dynamic reciprocity’ to describe the links between lived-bodies and film. As Barker states, “a lived body is always in the act of perceiving expression *and* expressing perception”. In cinema, film’s embodied modes of existence, its ability to see, hear, move physically and reflectively, allows the viewer to engage and respond in similar ways. They share certain ways “of being in, seeing and grasping the world, despite their vast differences as human and machine, one blood and tissue, the other light and celluloid”, but these experiences are always distinct too (2009:8).

Embodied perception and expression are seen as active rather than passive acts for filmmaker, film, and viewer. Barker states, “we do not ‘lose ourselves’ in the film, so much as we exist – emerge, really – in the contact between our body and the film’s body” (2009: 19). Rather than a complete bodily immersion, therefore, or simple identification with the image, Marks sees the interplay between an optic (visual) and haptic (bodily) forms of perception as the most useful means of critically engaging with images. For her, techniques involving moving between the image itself and the surface qualities of film can create a dialogue between what is known and visible, and that which is harder to distinguish, inviting the audience to reach out and touch and critically engage, while never being able to grasp fully. Marks asserts, “tactile epistemology involves thinking with your skin, or giving as much significance to the physical presence of an other as to the mental operations of symbolization” (Marks, 1998:344). Here, the intelligence of the perceiving body may come to know and



understand the world of images through not purely cognitive means. This approach expresses a “suspicion of vision”, aiming to offer a different kind of visibility (333). Through filmic techniques that both draw close and pull away, a dialogical encounter is thus set up, comprising a critical form of bodily engagement (342).

Marks describes the temptation to see haptic filming as a feminine way of viewing, through which the world is caressed and explored through small and intimate engagements, through glances, details and attention to the image’s surface texture rather than mastery. She prefers, however, to see the haptic as a feminist visual “strategy”, with potential to consciously disrupt and explore new meanings (2008: 336). This point is best exemplified in artist Carolee Schneemann’s *Fuses*. She politicises the image through a reclaiming of female sexuality in a sensuous and tactile depiction of female orgasm. As Barker acknowledges, the power of the film is not rhetorical, but “profoundly tactile” (2009:24). Schneemann wanted to see if the experience of film would have any correspondence to what she felt. She writes, “I wanted to put into that materiality of film the energies of the body, so that the film itself dissolves and recombines and is transparent and dense”.<sup>18</sup> Through the sensual use of surface texture such as scratches, dust, smooth dissolves and quick, fluttery cutting, the audience is invited to partake in this desire for themselves through the act of film viewing (Barker 2009:24).

Both Marks and Barker provide other examples of critical embodied approaches to filmmaking. Marks draws upon work from Middle Eastern and Arabic cinema to discuss her theorisations (2000, 1998). She describes the piece *Measures of Distance* by artist Mona Hatoum, in which the subject of a mother/daughter relationship is addressed. At the beginning of the film Arabic text is laid over the image, and the image itself is concealed through the video grain, before layers of meaning are slowly unveiled but never explicitly stated (343). The texture of the film sets up an intimate, tactile relationship between viewer and film, slowly revealing the subject matter but never rendering it entirely knowable.

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<sup>18</sup> Quote from <http://www.caroleeschneemann.com/fuses.html>. Last accessed 25.03.13

Barker provides different examples of how film might be conceived as a tactile medium through the use of camera techniques. Focusing on the opening scene of Andrei Tarkovsky's *Mirror*, which depicts a boy and his therapist, she sees the unsettling and unpredictable use of camerawork, such as through extreme intimate close-ups, followed by a sudden move by the camera along the path of its own intention, as establishing an intimate and complex relationship between three types of bodies: the character's, the viewer's and the film's. The film here draws the viewer close but never providing a solid 'anchor' or a single direction of intention or attention. She writes, "the film's body is a palpable, if elusive presence". It generates uneasiness in the viewer precisely by drawing attention to the film's body, more explicitly present than usual. This intentional use of camerawork also serves to mirror and reinforce what is actually being played out in the scene; "as the therapist speaks of tension, kinetic forces, bodily movements and flowing speech, the film's body itself enacts these." (Barker, 2009:11).

There are many other ways that film has been written about as a tactile and embodied medium, which have led to various interpretations of what this might mean<sup>19</sup>. While in the above examples Marks focuses on caressing and feminine forms of tactility such as by drawing attention to surface texture, Barker instead refers to camera techniques such as close-ups and movement. She also goes further in her theorisations to consider many different forms of touch available through film, starting with the eye, moving to skin, the musculature and finally to total immersion, or visceral experience (2009:2).

The scope of an embodied filmmaking framework is very broad, with much conceptual ground still unfolding. According to this viewpoint, all films could essentially be interpreted as embodied in some way, especially when the film itself is conceived as a body in itself through which lived experience is channelled. The examples of Marks and Barker are central, however, as their ideas provide the basis for the embodied camera techniques and 'strategies' I developed in this research, as

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<sup>19</sup> See also MacDougall (2006); Rutherford, (2002); Marks, (2002), (1999); Shaviro, (1993); Lant (1995).

part of my experimental ethnographic approach. They are a means to actively engage with and disrupt film's "wild" qualities.

While all the forms of tactility suggested by Marks and Barker are too far-reaching to be explored in this research, I apply certain approaches such as embodied camerawork, camera movements and a tactile interplay between surface and depth to my own research. Before illustrating the use of these tactile and performative 'strategies' in my film, I want to locate them more clearly within my own practice. I am influenced too here by certain interpretations of Judith Butler's ideas in 'Gender Trouble', and want to link these to Marks and Barker's writing. She uses the term performativity in relation to gender to argue that there is no natural, pre-existing self. Instead, through the stylized repetition of acts that are reinforced over time and inherited through generations, certain norms of identity and gender are engrained (Salih and Butler, 2004: 91). For Butler, these performed gestures are constrictive and oppressive. Yet other commentators have appropriated these ideas to suggest that an awareness of the politics of performance might also be grounds on which to question or disrupt these very re-iterations of performativity. Diamond acknowledges that every performance "embeds features of previous performances: gender conventions, racial histories, aesthetic traditions" (1996:1), but at the same time asserts the role of agency. She writes that through performance emerges the "possibility of materialising something that exceeds our knowledge...and imagines other as yet unsuspected modes of being." (1996: 2). It is this active potential to disrupt and explore new understandings of the world that interest Marks and Barker too in relation to film. Like Marks then, I too see an embodied approach as a filmmaking 'strategy' that allows for tentative, personal and alternative forms of visualising and knowing through film. It is through a conscious awareness of certain conventions that they might be dismantled, explored and questioned.

My intention to explore the subconscious and tactile qualities of place and ritual are, following Marks, intended partly as feminist strategies, but are not intended to be exclusively so. They are adopted too as more general explorations on the politics of place and image-making. I am influenced, for example, by de Certeau, who wrote about the possibility for strategically taking control of city spaces by walking through them (1984). For him, individual movements through the city are seen as an active

means of appropriating space and self-empowerment. Certain spatial 'tactics' such as taking shortcuts and creating unique routes are seen as forms of acting out and creating relationships to public space, rather than being subject to its forces. These are techniques that influence my own approach. But there are certain affinities and embodied connections suggested here too between my own tactile filmmaking gestures in the landscape as a means of taking control, and the (predominantly male) locals' ritual performances in the landscape that similarly comprise active forms of resistance and empowerment.

To briefly provide some examples of the performative strategies in my own work, I actively aim to represent the textures and sensual qualities of place, ritual and landscape through drawing close to the rituals and landscapes in my film. I walk and move through place and space with my camera, drawing in close to landscapes to touch and sense them with my recording devices. I copy local behaviour at the rituals, and convey intimate details of the rituals themselves such as through gestures, close-ups and movement. In doing so I aim to provoke a dialogical and imaginative relationship between my own embodied experiences and those of others. Just as locals perform their own meanings in the landscape, so too my own and my camera's actions can be seen as performative gestures in themselves.

I also continually draw attention back to the physical presence of film's body through the use of more abstract imagery during the ritual sequences, re-filming techniques and hand-processed 16mm film. These techniques add other meanings to the images, play between surface and depth, and draw attention to the processes of production. The intimate use of local voices and the ambiguity of the narrator's voiceover in relation to my own experiences are also other means to intimately draw close to the image and disclose tactile relationships with the world, while at the same time distancing through critique and fictionalisation. While there is a tension between lived experience and verbal explanation, some argue that language itself is a form of 'being-in the world', not only representing or referring to, but *disclosing* our being-in-the-world (Ricoeur 1991, cited in Low and Lawrence-Zuniga, 2003:6). In this research I adhere to this belief, interested both in the phenomenological and dialogical possibilities of the use of voice in my film. The ways in which I apply these

techniques will be explained in more detail in relation to my own work in the next chapter on filming methods.

To expand upon my strategic use of camera movement, these conceptions contain affinities with my previous discussion on the interconnections between people, place and ritual, in which relationships are forged through actively being in the world and moving through and performing in it. By self-consciously being in the world with my camera, my own movements and intentions also become active embodied techniques through which to connect, imagine and perform new meanings.

I return once more to the concept of movement as a means of knowing and understanding the world. Ingold and Vergunst, in 'Ways of Walking' explore how many of our actions take place on the move. For them it is through a dynamic rather than static relationship with the world that it is known and understood. They specifically explore the notion of walking as, "not just what the body *does*; it is what the body *is*" (2008; 2). So integral are our movements through the world to the way that we know and understand it that the body and world are inseparable. Movement is also importantly seen as a social act, as a means of linking our own experiences with those of others. They refer to Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's term "thinking in movement" (1999, cited on p.2) to describe how "to think and feel is not to set up a relation of external contact or correspondence between subjective states of mind and objectively given conditions of the material world, but rather to make one's way *through* a world-in-formation, in a movement that is...rhythmically resonant with the movements of others around us – whose journeys we share or whose paths we cross" (2008:2).

Filming on the move is thus a means to evoke a kind of 'rhythmical resonance' with the movements of others, a form of connecting both physically and socially to these shared bodily experiences. The rituals provide powerful means through which locals remember and connect to the past, real and imagined. Filming also is seen as means of imagining the footsteps of many who have gone before in the same place through ritual performance. Ingold and Vergunst write, "even after people have left a place where they have walked, something of themselves remains there. That is why treading in predecessor's footprints, so that they mingle with one's own, is enough to

establish a relationship of co-presence” (2008: 7). In this way the audience is provided with a means to imagine and empathise with these experiences, while at the same time never allowed full immersion. They are reminded of the performative gaps and distinctions between bodily experiences of subjects, filmmaker, film and those of the audience themselves.

That film is capable of evoking physical bodily reactions and forms of knowing in an audience has been written about by various commentators. MacDougall noted that there is an ‘involuntary mimicry’ that comes into play when seeing others’ bodies. He uses the example of babies who mimic the facial expressions of their parents (2006; 23-24). Merleau-Ponty describes this experience as “a postural ‘impregnation’ of my own body by the conducts I witness” (23). This idea moves beyond empathy to suggest that the body can respond in both emotional and physical ways to what is witnessed. MacDougall provides the example of watching someone walk on a tightrope. An audience will writhe and twist physically as well as responding emotionally (23). This suggests that filmmakers are able to create corporeal responses in the viewer.

Anthropologist Michael Taussig attributes the ability of film to ‘flood’ into a person as ‘tactile knowing’ through the twofold ability of ‘mimesis’ both in copying but also uniting viewer with the viewed through the “visceral quality of the percept”. Film, Taussig writes, can cause a “merging of the object of perception with the body of the perceiver”, but can also hit the spectator “like a bullet.” (Taussig, 1994:208). Film theorist Paul Virilio, in ‘War and Cinema’ paraphrases New York video artist Nam June Paik: “Cinema isn’t I see, it’s I fly”. He incorporates the artists free-falling image and the bodily response and participation this evoked in the audience into his argument about new ways of seeing through the camera opened up for massive destruction such as war (Virilio, 1989, in Taussig, 1994:210). Film’s visceral potential is demonstrated here as being incredibly powerful.

While both MacDougall (2006) and Taussig (1994; 210) acknowledge that this kinaesthetic potential of cinema is not new, and has been explored throughout the history of the medium in terms of both camera work and narrative, they have only recently been brought to the analytical foreground.

As a final reflection on embodied camerawork and movement in this chapter, it seems to me that research centred around embodied and performative filmmaking is an interesting investigative framework to explore performative ritual, just as focusing on performative ritual is a suitable means for exploring embodied filmmaking, due to the affinities that exist between film and ritual experience. Both are embodied practices, and the filming of the rituals, and filming in general, is also capable of inducing altered bodily reactions or heightened states of being or forms of 'flow' or immersion, both in filmmaker and audience. These experiences contain similarities to those suggested in my previous discussion on ritual experience itself, but at the same time are distinct too. This was thus what filmmaker Jean Rouch recognised when he talked about his own state of 'ciné-trance' induced when he filmed ritual. Conceiving of film as an embodied practice in this context is both a means to better understand the ritual experiences of others but also to explore the embodied experiences and qualities of filmmaking and film viewing in and of itself, its transformative or even ecstatic potential. Framing the research in this way draws the focus back to an investigation not just on a world 'out there', but the alchemical potential of film to evoke altered experiences. I apply these ideas more specifically to certain methods I adopted in Chapter 2.

The approaches I have discussed in detail so far in relation to my research, namely embodied and performative filming, refer mainly to experimental ethnographic techniques I used when 'in the field' collecting audio-visual materials. These approaches are by their nature subjective and reflexive actions, in which the self is inevitably written into the film, through my own intentional acts and bodily presence. The self is then further inscribed into the film later through the use of voiceover, editing and re-filming techniques. The footage is reworked so as to imagine new meanings, and my own experiences are transformed through the use of a fictional female narrator. While elements of auto-ethnography and fictionalisation form a part of the whole filmmaking process and form part of my discussion on performativity, I discuss them here primarily in relation to the interpretation of the audio-visual materials I collected during the research period, and the ways these were then shaped into the final film.

Russell describes auto-ethnography as an approach that can be used as a form of cultural criticism. She writes, “Autobiography becomes ethnographic at the point where the film- or video maker understands his or her personal history to be implicated in larger social formations and historical processes. Identity is no longer a transcendental or essential self that is revealed, but a ‘staging of subjectivity’ – a representation of the self as a performance” (1999: 276). These ideas are thus an extension of the notion of performance already discussed in the previous section, but further developed in relation to the construction of my film<sup>20</sup>. The self becomes a political device, in which an individual, personal perspective not only underpins the subjective, tactile position of the whole film.<sup>21</sup> It also serves to de-stabilise. Ambiguities and questions are raised so as to deny purely realist interpretations. The creation of a persona in the film is thus a means to explore “discursive possibilities of inauthentic subjectivities” (Russell: 276).

Foster cites a lack of critical approaches to ethnographic models and insufficient reflexivity in contemporary art (1996:196), which is in danger of moving “from collaboration to self-fashioning, from a decentering of the artist as cultural authority to a remaking of the other in neo-primitivist guise” which can aid in the colonisation of difference (Foster, 1996:196-7). For artists who have adopted the ethnographic model, Kwon also states there has often been an “overvaluation of ‘personal experience’ as the basis of true and reliable knowledge about culture and the self.” (Kwon, 2001: 76). There are of course artists who have critically explored their positioning. Nowhere is the exploitative relationship between self and other made more explicit and uncomfortable than in artist Renzo Marten’s documentary *Enjoy Poverty* (2009) set in the Congo. In this piece, he presents poverty as a resource that locals should take advantage of. By erecting a huge sign in a village with the words

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<sup>20</sup> Every stage of the research thus also containing elements of reflexivity and auto-ethnography, as the self is inseparable from the whole process. Auto-ethnography is discussed primarily at this interpretive stage, however, in this film, as it is at this point that decisions were made regarding where to position myself in relation to the image. Russell sees the use of voice as just one of three ways the self can be inscribed into the film, the others being the origin of the gaze, and as body image, with their combined potential providing “rich discursive possibilities” (1999: 277).

<sup>21</sup> Mark Newmann defines auto-ethnographic texts as ones that “*democratize* the representational sphere of culture by locating the particular experiences of individuals in tension with dominant expressions of discursive power” (1996, cited in Denzin, 2006).



'Enjoy Poverty' lit up in neon, he points to the fact that poverty sells. A photo of a dying child, for example, can net 50 US Dollars. By making this film, Martens at once distances himself performatively from the work, but at the same time is implicated in this cycle of exploitation too himself, as the filmmaker always inevitably is.

Contrary also to the dangers of uncritically underlining difference discussed by Foster, Russell cites an auto-ethnographic approach as a means precisely of breaking down colonial ethnographic perspectives, an ideal form of "antidocumentary" in their ability to blur the binary oppositions of self and other characteristic of anthropological discourses of the past (1999:277). Kwon too suggests that to overcome these dangers effectively this voice needs to be deconstructed, rather than claiming any fixed authorship (2001: 77), and, again, the "*relational* dynamic between experience and interpretation, between participation and observation", needs to be recognised (87).

Anthropologist Sara Delamont (2007) also argues against auto-ethnography as an approach that is too self-absorbed at the expense of the subject of study, but her argument misses Clifford's important point that, "every version of an 'other', wherever found, is also the construction of a 'self'" (Clifford, 1986:23), and that ethnography "is always caught up in the invention, not the representation, of cultures" (2). Denzin, summarising different ways auto-ethnography has been conceived, draws on Laurel Richardson and Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre's use of the term 'Creative Analytical Practices' to describe the ways new ethnographic practices might be produced. These anthropologists use this term to include auto-ethnography, fiction stories, poetry, performance texts, allegory, and so on. These approaches are reflexive but not meant to be self-obsessed. They connect biography and the stance of the author with the social structure, but at the same time do not completely write the self into the text (2006:2-3)<sup>22</sup>. This definition, that allows for open interpretations and performative rather than authentic meanings, resonates best with my own understandings of an ethnographic approach and its application in this research. Ethnography is never an innocent practice (Denzin, 2006: 2), and auto-ethnography

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<sup>22</sup> This view is one also advocated by anthropologist Jay Ruby, (1980).

is an arguably essential strategy to deal critically with inter-subjective meaning if the research is to be transparent.

Having now framed conceptually the key approaches taken in my research, I will further contextualise this study by discussing other films, past and contemporary, that have explored themes of place, and the camera and filmmaker's relationship to people and environment.

### **Films on place, performance and embodied experience**

There are of course innumerable ways in which the lived experiences of place, landscape and ritual have been addressed in film. This section will provide a brief overview of some of the different approaches that have been taken as an extension of the arguments presented here, and in relation to my research. While all film contains ingrained within it phenomenological qualities of lived experience before further meaning is imposed, and arguably all film also contains performative elements through its construction, this is not always explicitly or self-consciously acknowledged and explored. Further, not all films attempt to embody or draw close to lived experience within place. Some may consciously seek to disrupt or remain distant, and others may be read as embodied despite not have originally been conceived in that way. The examples provided here consider in particular political and conceptual readings of the landscape, embodied and ethnographic approaches to place, and structural and experimental film approaches, although these are not necessarily discrete categories. While I briefly refer to some films that address ritual experience in this section, I leave an in-depth review of folk and ritual films until the end of Chapter 3, to link them with my broader discussion of perceptions and representations of folk culture.

Firstly, on the theme of place and the English landscape, Patrick Keiller's films have been particularly influential in their renderings of the politics of place and belonging in contemporary society. In *London* (1994), *Robinson in Ruins* (2010), and *Robinson in Space* (1997), he scrutinises the country's landscapes and townscapes through the eyes of a fictional narrator. He finds evidence of exclusion and power, of the

“strangely placeless contemporary surface of the landscape” (Wright in Keiller, 1999:229). These central themes are mirrored in the filmmaking style itself. Static, tripod bound shots mainly taken from a distance do not allow for a tactile or sensory engagement with the landscape, suggesting a severing of people from place. Adam Kossoff, in his own Keiller-esque film *Made in Wolverhampton* (2012) takes a similar stance, exploring the landscape of the city where he works as one largely forgotten by the forces of capitalism with their ability to alienate and exclude. The distance evoked between himself and the city, his desire to be somewhere else, is effectively captured in the static camera shots, distancing filmmaker and viewer from place and lived experience.

The refusal of Keiller’s films to ground themselves in one particular place could also be seen as a reflection on the fragmented nature of what it means to belong in a globalised world. Kossoff frames his film as a letter to a woman he met in Cuba. By evoking comparisons between Cuba and Wolverhampton, he longs to return to a place that seems to exist more in the imagination than in reality, the appeal of an elsewhere reinforcing his dissatisfaction with present.

A critical distancing and filming across many places is an approach also central to Chris Marker’s *Sans Soleil* (1983), and Karen Mirza/Brad Butler’s *The Exception and the Rule* (2009). *Sans Soleil* comprises a non-linear essay film based on footage shot across different continents narrated by a fictional female who reads letters sent to her by an imaginary cameraman Sandor Krasna. In the *Exception and the Rule* consciously political themes are negotiated. Shot in Pakistan, India and the UK, it comprises a complex “cumulative assembly of voice, image, citation, actor, participant and situation”<sup>23</sup>, refusing conventional documentary genres or linear narratives. While my own film is grounded in Haxey and Padstow, movement between places and the perspective of a London-based narrator adds complexity to the meaning to place in my work, and suggest the inter-relations between them. However, unlike the goals of Marker and Mirza/Butler, the intention is still to explore connections in and between places, rather than a more critical severing from place

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<sup>23</sup> quoted from Mirza and Butler’s online description of the film. [<http://www.mirza-butler.net/index.php?/project/the-exception-and-the-rule/>-last accessed 09.05.13].

and refusal of meaning. All of the above examples use distancing devices and a withdrawal from lived experience, through which the work becomes a form of criticism. I instead adopt an opposing conceptual approach. I draw close with my camera to explore personal, tactile and feminine meanings that play between experiential and discursive, conscious and subconscious realms. These in themselves are also a form of resistance. My embodied and performative approach provides an alternative means through which to question the inter-relationships between people and place, and the politics of documentary filmmaking.

Returning to films based primarily in one place, the interplay between local and global power relations as manifested in specific locales was importantly explored in *Handsworth Songs* (John Akomfrah, 1986). Footage shot during the 1985 riots in this troubled neighbourhood in Birmingham is layered with archive footage of Caribbean immigrants arriving in England in the 1950's. The film deals with issues of identity politics during that time, with post-colonial power relations looming in the background. The imagery is poeticised, fragmented and non-linear, as "a means of countering the truth-values of the authoritative discourses of British TV newsreels from which much of the footage is borrowed." (Russell, 1999: 265). Through the collage style of filmmaking the aim is furthermore to suggest "the multiplicity of cultural histories from which diasporic identity is constructed" (266), rather than to present one coherent narrative.

More recently, Akomfrah's *9 Muses* (2010) continued to explore the complex relationships between people and place. Using Homer's poem *The Odyssey* as a narrative starting point, this epic journey is then combined with archive materials of the post-war exoduses from India and the Caribbean to Britain, and other poetic images of static figures within wintry landscapes. Again the politics of belonging and moving between places is a central theme to the work. But in this case it is reflected on in more subtle ways through the style of a meditative tone-poem and with meaning left more open. While the camera does not draw close in here, there is still a sense of intimacy created by the personal literary reflections of Homer and many others on the nature of journeys and home, both real and imagined.

Other subtle and meditative portraits of people and their close inter-relationships with the landscape, and in the context of loss, politics and marginalisation are exemplified in the Terence Malick's *Days of Heaven* (1978), and more recently Lance Hammer's *Ballast* (2008). Both filmmakers attempt to capture something of the 'feeling' of the landscape, and its powerful symbolic imagery, constructing a poetic narrative out of these bleak settings. Here the viewer is drawn in close. They are made to feel the intimacy of the landscape and the people within it in order to imagine something of the sensual qualities of lived experience. Both films intercut narrative sequences with intimate shots of place and landscape to create a real sense of place and the people living there. These examples are both located within the genre of fiction film, however, and ultimately the textures and details of the landscape are used to serve the storyline. In my own work I aim to place more emphasis on the experiential qualities of place and ritual in and for themselves, at times stepping away completely from any narrative context.

Margaret Tait's *Portrait of Ga* (1952), while not created in an overtly political context, equally succeeds in positioning the film's subject (Tait's mother) in close interrelationship with her home and place through filming her mother within her local Scottish landscapes. She effectively intercuts detailed close-up shots of both her mother and the landscape to create an intensely personal, tactile viewpoint, drawing together filmmaker, subject and place. Images of her mother positioned within local landscapes are interspersed with intimate details of her hair, her hands, the texture of her clothes and close-ups of the landscape. Though this poetic interweaving, a feeling of harmony is created, and a sense that the filmmaker and her mother are at ease with each other in the landscape. Here, the gaps and tensions that exist between filmmaker and represented are portrayed as less problematic than in the context of my research, where encounters were at times tense and boundaries put up against perceived outsiders in Padstow.

People's affective relationships to the places and small communities where they live were more recently depicted in Gideon Koppel's documentary *Sleep Furiously* (2008), set in a village in rural Wales, and Raymond Depardon's film *Modern Life* (2008), a portrait of traditional farmers in the south-central region of Cevennes. In both films changing ways of life are portrayed, but neither over-sentimentalises. Koppel

chooses to explore village life by watching from a distance and not intervening, while Depardon, after extended periods first getting to know subjects, interviews the extraordinary characters he meets in their homes. In David Gladwell's *Requiem for a Village* (1975), a fictional gravedigger remembers times gone by in his village by conjuring up in his imagination all the people buried there. While the film comprises a search for the past that could be interpreted as an idealisation of times gone by, such a poetic piece of work denies simplistic readings. Film critic Elizabeth Sussex (2011) writes, "It is altogether something more fluid and impressionistic – an attempt, as I see it, to show the co-existence of all things in time". This approach resonates with my own work that presents the traditions in the context of change and memory, but does so through poetry and imagination, and a focus on embodied *presence* in relation to the past.

Other films suggest more troubled relationships between people and landscape, or deal with fear of place. While this initial premise is in contrast with my own which focuses primarily on people's performative means of connecting to, and forming affective ties with place, the deep psychological impacts places can induce, whether positive or negative, is relevant here. David Ferrando Girault's film *Road Movie – Perpetuum Mobile* (2008) recently screened as part of the recent Topophobia Symposium, for example (2012<sup>24</sup>). He presents the landscapes from near his childhood home in Spain, by staging the scene of a car accident there. The camera slowly pans around, always searching for what is off-camera, and the only clue remaining is the smoking remains of the vehicle. The landscape here appears with an underlying and ever-present sinister edge. He claims to have been much influenced by TV and films he watched during his childhood such as *The Blair Witch Project* and *Twin Peaks*, which then filled his imagination and generated the fear he felt towards the woods near his house.

Many other films have dealt with similar issues. In Jonathan Hodgson's animation, *Forest Murmurs* (2006), a series of walks in Epping Forest to uncover the sinister past becomes more a journey into the disturbed imagination of the filmmaker. Philip

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<sup>24</sup> This event took place at Central St. Martin's College, February 2012.

Sanderson's film *Hangway Turning* (1990), likewise is an imaginative journey through the landscape framed by the myth of a car crash near Bluebell Hill in Kent where three women died, and where there had been ghost sightings and the disappearance of women hitchhikers. Here the reciprocal relationship between landscape and people is suggested, as the female voiceover tells us, "The crash in some way permanently altered the landscape. The emotional energy released by the impact being of such force that it has become imprinted on the bluebell hill forever." In Esther Johnson's *Hinterland* (2002), another kind of anxiety is expressed towards place by the residents of a small community in East Yorkshire whose homes are under threat from the encroaching sea. The film weaves local voices over visuals of the place to explore how it feels to be living such a precarious situation.

Tensions between people and place are the primary concerns of the above examples, and a reminder that all places and landscapes are replete with complex memories and associations. The local voices used in my own film suggest some of the tension for people living in Padstow and Haxey, but in these cases some redemption is offered through the performative folk rituals, as means to re-connect and re-appropriate local landscapes. Feelings of anxiety towards place are not only be felt by people who reside there. My own process of representing place was also one that induced fears at times, particularly in the context of Padstow, where tensions with 'outsiders' formed the backdrop of my research there.

Artist filmmaker Sarah Pucill, in *Taking my Skin* (2006) more directly addresses the themes of embodiment and film. Through the work she explores filmmaking as a form of tactile encounter, the ways film physically presents lived experience, and what that might mean conceptually for the subject being represented. Within the piece, Pucill films her own mother (with her mother also at times filming her), and presents a dialogue between them, in which they reflect on the process of filmmaking and how it feels to be on camera. "I'm not aware of you taking my skin", says the artist's mother to the camera as it zooms in on her eye as close as the lens will allow. There is implied here a potential collapsing of boundaries through the phenomenological qualities of film of great relevance to my research. In common with my own work, attention is drawn to the inter-connections between the body of subject, filmmaker and film. The

context here differs, however, as it involves a formally set up and performed scenario rather than a drawing close to and reflecting on real-life situations.

In the history of films that could loosely be termed ethnographic or documentary, certain filmmakers have emphasised the role of lived experience in understanding other places and cultures, and these approaches have often been grounded within specific localities.

The earliest example of this in anthropology was the 1898 Cambridge University expedition to the Torres Strait. This research marked a move away from the 'armchair' anthropology characteristic of the preceding era, with a new emphasis on fieldwork as methodological form of enquiry. Direct observation and lived experience formed the basis of time spent out in the field, with vision forming a central part of the project (Grimshaw, 2001:21). Film comprised just one aspect of the research, which also included photography and a vast array of scientific recordings. Haddon's trip in many ways still fitted within a nineteenth century paradigm. He was himself essentially a 'salvage anthropologist' who believed in recording aspects of culture before they disappeared, with the materials gathered on this trip primarily intended to serve as evidence. The fixed camera perspective was one in which the filmmaker looked in from the outside, with power relations and difference undoubtedly reinforced when these seemingly exotic and 'primitive' images were played to an audience back home in 1900 (2001:23). Yet Grimshaw suggests that the few remaining fragments of film that survived from the trip, amounting to only four minutes, testify to a very modern sensibility too. Haddon's aesthetic as a filmmaker resembles older theatrical conventions, and his use of the Lumiere cinematographe reveals culture "as lived, as performance" through the real lived world being animated in single, unchanging shots (2001: 24). Grimshaw suggests that these moving images "threatened to undermine" central elements of the salvage paradigm, for "moving film is about connections, processes and the linking of the past with the present and future".

Another important moment in considering historical conceptions of film's role in anthropological fieldwork came about in the 1930s through Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead's Balinese project (1936-1938). This was innovative in its attempt to



use 16mm film not merely to record visual aspects of culture. The aim of the project was to explore the relationship between parent-child interactions and the development of Balinese character. While the project studied external behaviour, it was in the belief that this could disclose certain cultural attitudes and social relationships. Bateson was particularly interested in how film might be used to learn about emotional states through gesture and body movement. For Mead, on the other hand, film and photography served largely as a form of documentation to back up direct observations (MacDougall, 2006:241). MacDougall highlights an important distinction in these approaches to film. He describes Mead's attitude to film as form of *seeing*, implying a passive form of vision. Bateson, however, recognises the more dynamic possibilities of the camera, implying filmmaking is an intentional and active activity that he terms *looking*, in which meaning is sought out, or invested in through the process. MacDougall does acknowledge, however, that there is intention within every film, whether explicitly stated or not (242). This period of fieldwork resulted in the later issuing of a series of seven films entitled, 'Character Formation in Different Cultures', including *Trance and Dance in Bali* (1952), and *A Balinese Family* (1952).

Both of the above examples represent somewhat polemical attitudes to film's role within anthropological research at the times they were produced. They infer the performative and subjective characteristics inherent in the medium that were largely otherwise ignored. While these themes were not explored to their full potential in these contexts, they nonetheless contradicted the goals of the scientific research projects they formed a part of, and demonstrate the potential of the medium itself in transforming place and lived experience.

The requirement for ethnographic filmmaking to produce evidence that could then be consolidated into disciplinary knowledge was an attitude that prevailed for most over many subsequent decades. By the 1970s, the new field of visual anthropology was divided into two main groups. There were those who continued to pursue these traditional goals of ethnography, and others such as Jean Rouch, who, working outside of the rigid demands of the discipline, instead saw film as potential means of generating new forms of anthropological knowledge (MacDougall, 1998:240). Those who did attempt to produce evidence through filmmaking instead often exposed the problematic nature of the whole project. Winston (cited in Grimshaw, 2001:88), for

example, analyses the construction of meaning by anthropologists Timothy Asch and Napoleon Chagnon in *The Axe Fight* (1975). Through a series of explanations and kinship diagrams, they try and explain how anthropological knowledge is produced. Yet because the claims in their film were not sustained by evidence within their footage, they instead “exposed the shaky foundation upon which scientific ethnography is built” (Grimshaw, 2001:88).

In other forms of documentary filmmaking there were few questioning the ideological implications of filmmaking until the 1960s<sup>25</sup>, with the advent of the ‘direct cinema’ and ‘cinema verité’ movements. Moving away from privileged forms of filmmaking, dominated by studios and large crews, the advent of sync sound and lightweight cameras allowed for less authoritative forms of representation. A new emphasis was placed on the encounters between filmmaker and subject, offering a more personal view of the world. Yet other problems surfaced. In “direct cinema” the power shifted instead to the individual, who was free to exploit their presence as they wished. Some aimed to capture subjects unaffected by the presence of the filmmaker, yet this form of “self-deception” was itself deeply ideological (MacDougall, 1998: 203-204).

Returning to Jean Rouch, his groundbreaking *Chronicle of a Summer* (1960), was one of the first films to explicitly foreground the interventional, performative role of the filmmaker and the capacity to transform reality in this way. Rather than conceal his presence, ‘reality’ is actively intervened in, reactions from subjects provoked, and meaning the result of the encounter between filmmaker and filmed in Rouch’s investigation into people’s lived experiences of Paris.

In terms of ritual experience, a point to which I shall return, Rouch’s *Les Maitres Fous* (1955) also retains awareness that film is the product of this encounter between self and others, and highlights subjective, lived experience as the means of knowing the

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<sup>25</sup> There are of course exceptions, such as Russian filmmaker Dziga Vertov, who in the 1920s used the term ‘kino-pradva’ (film truth) to explore a world that the camera could produce as distinct from any external reality as explored in *A Man with a Movie Camera* (1929). Within the canon of British documentary, Humphrey Jennings’s films such as *Spare time* (1939) and *Listen to Britain* (1942) were as much about Jennings’s own poetic imagination as the social realities they portrayed, themselves also disruptions of conventional documentary forms.

world. Maya Deren also foregrounds the role of the camera in exploring movement through slow motion shots within ritual in *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (1953), her own position as filmmaker always integral to the final piece<sup>26</sup>. I will return to discuss these films in more detail in Chapter 3.

In considering contemporary approaches to ethnographic filmmaking, Ben River's films have often been referred to as ethnographic in their approach. His recent films *Two Years at Sea* (2011), *This is my Land* (2006), and *Origin of the Species*, (2008), comprise portraits of reclusive men living in remote parts of Scotland outside the boundaries of society. To create these intimate pieces and present this intensely private world to an audience, he spent time with his subjects getting to know them before then recording them. These films are highly effective in capturing something of the essence of these characters living in their isolated environments, but there is a less critical or reflective relationship at work here between filmmaker, filmed and audience. These films are more about creating an immersive, empathetic experience than reflecting back on the experiences of filmmaker and viewer, and what it might mean for him to intervene in this way.

Ben Russell frames his work conscious of contemporary thought on ethnography and the role of sensory experience in knowing places and cultures located within them. He also seems to be addressing the possibilities that place and landscapes are known by actively moving through them which is a central approach in this research. *Let Each One Go Where He May* (2009) comprises a series of walks in which the camera follows closely behind Benjen and Monie Pansa, inhabitants of the Saramaccan Maroons community in Suriname, through a series of ten-minute unbroken sequences which track their daily journeys to work. The intimate qualities of lived phenomenological experience are represented on film as the spaces are moved through, an idea already discussed in my own filmmaking and influenced by Tim Ingold. Yet Russell's film contains constructed elements and could also be read as a critique of ethnographic film. There is no dialogue, the subjects remain unexplained and unknown to the audience, and the power relations between filmmaker and filmed

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<sup>26</sup> See also *Ritual in Transfigured Time* (1946), *Meditation on Violence* (1948) and *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943).

are self-evident<sup>27</sup>. A central concern of this piece is also the impact these camera movements might have on an audience, and the altered states these might be capable of inducing. These themes connect closely to my own interests in representing ritual, so will be explored more in the Chapter 3 when discussing ritual on film.

The technique of moving through the world with the camera as a form of embodied engagement and performing subjectivity is one that has also been much used in fiction films. Gus Van Sant also effectively employs camera movements in the film *Elephant* (2003) to follow students in a fictionalised account of the Columbine High School massacre in 1999. Through it the audience is able to imagine and empathise with the points of view of those there at the time and the incidents leading up to the disaster. I am reminded here also of the polemical works of Philippe Grandrieux and Gaspar Noé. In Grandrieux's *A Lake* (2009), the experiential qualities of living in the forest in Russia are depicted. This is not through narrative but rather by a dynamic and poetic use of the camera through which the visceral qualities of living close to nature are conveyed and imagined. As the shutter is opened for extended periods in the dusky forest light, the handheld camera follows the lead characters as they walk through the forest. Their forms are at times blurred and impressionistic, drawing attention to the screen's surface. At the same time, they allow powerful emotional and embodied connections to be evoked in an audience. In Noé's film *Enter the Void* (2009), the camera follows the embodied perspective of a deceased small-time drug dealer whose spirit hovers over Tokyo city, re-visiting scenes from his life, and taking the audience themselves on a hallucinatory and nauseating journey. To me these films are powerful examples of embodied approaches to filmmaking in contexts distinct from my own.

Experimenting in more political contexts, the work of Stephen Dwoskin provides a particularly challenging embodied perspective, requiring the audience to imagine his viewpoint while sat in a wheelchair filming (see for example, *Me, Myself and I*, 1968). The camera longingly peers up at the beautiful women he encounters, but reminds us too of his disability. And Margaret Raspe experiments with a purpose-built camera

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<sup>27</sup> Russell however is very familiar with his subjects through time first spend there in the Peace Corps.

helmet in *Oh Death How Nourishing You Are* (1972-3), in which this intimate, embodied perspective is used to explore themes of personal responsibility and death.

Returning to walking through space with a camera, William Raban, in *The Houseless Shadow* (2011), uses this technique too in a documentary context. The camera tracks around the contemporary streets of London as a means of re-performing and re-imagining the night walks of Dickens. New layers of meaning are added in the process, in this context primarily in relation to lived experiences of the past. Grant Gee's *Patience (After Sebald)* (2012), likewise involved the filmmaker shooting his own footsteps as he re-traced the walking tour of East Anglia that W.G. Sebald undertook in 1998, that inspired the writing of his part factual, part fictional travelogue 'The Rings of Saturn' (1998).

In my research, as well as the technique of walking and moving through space with my camera I pan out of train and cars windows, and from a moving boat. This is a means to engage dynamically with the spaces I moved through, and to imagine the journeys of others who travel back to the folk traditions. I will discuss this more in relation to my own work in Chapter 2. Many others have used similar viewpoints. Chris Petit shoots from a moving car in *London Orbital* (2002). In Sarah Turner's *Perestroika* (2009), and Phillipe Parreno's *June 8, 1968* (2009), both films are framed from the perspective of a moving train. Tina Keane's *Shadow of a Journey* (1980), and William Raban's *Thames Film* (1986) are shot from moving boats, and certain images in Andrew Kotting's *Swandown* (2012) were captured from a moving swan pedalo. These various approaches have all been used in various ways as a means of performing the filmmaker's relationship to, and engaging with, the contemporary landscape. They are also a means of remembering and forgetting, of imagining past and present through dynamic inter-actions between filmmaker, space and place.

In the fields of structural and artist filmmaking, there have been many other responses to place and landscape<sup>28</sup>. By the term structural filmmakers I refer to a term introduced in the 1960s by avant-garde film historian P. Adams Sitney to refer

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<sup>28</sup> Many of the filmmakers previously mentioned could also be broadly located within artist or structural filmmaking practices, such as Mirza/Butler, Raban, Kossoff, Akomfrah, Tait, Girault, Sanderson, Pucill, Hodgson, Johnson, Rivers, Russell, Raspe and Dwoskin.

to filmmakers exploring the materiality of the medium and processes of production as their primary concern, with more emphasis on form than content. And by artist filmmakers I refer more generally to filmmakers situating themselves outside of mainstream forms of representation, many of who maintain a strong awareness of the politics of image-making in their work. My own research is influenced by the history of these fields as much as documentary and ethnographic filmmaking for these reasons<sup>29</sup>.

In 'The Garden in the Machine' (2001), experimental film critic Scott MacDonald looks at key examples of late 20<sup>th</sup> century independent films about place, seeing them as having much in common with 19<sup>th</sup> century artists and writers obsessed with representing "wilderness" and the pastoral "middle state", adopted here as a form of critique of capitalist culture, and as a means of escape (2001:3-4). However, within this somewhat idealised projection, contradictions and critique seep through the rural landscapes depicted. In Larry Gottheim's *Fog Line* (1970), for example, the fixed camera casts its gaze on a rural landscape as the fog slowly lifts. This initially idyllic scene slowly emerges to reveal electricity lines cutting through the image. The grain of the film and flattening effect of the telephoto lens both testify to the presence of a technological medium and the transformation of reality. Here a fixed frame and extended shots overtly resist mainstream tendencies in cinema. This is at once an intimate portrait of the landscape that demands close reflection through duration, but at the same time creates critical distance through complicating the scene being represented.

The interplay between the rural and urban as contrasting spaces suggested by Gottheim is one more overtly addressed by Hollis Frampton in seminal film *Zors Lemma* (1970). Depictions of rural landscapes are again set within references to the structural confines of the film frame, implying a separation from the innocence of nature, and the viewers' experiences filtered through "our cultural history and the geography that encodes it." (MacDonald, 2001:255). What is interesting about MacDonald's readings of these films in this context is their being compared to the

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<sup>29</sup> That is not to say that many documentary and ethnographic films I refer to do not also exist outside of mainstream fields of production. Reflexive approaches and political awareness are of course also commonplace in these fields too.

work of nineteenth century artists looking for escapism from the effects of modernisation. These issues are then made more complex through the mechanical medium of film. Parallels could be drawn here with choosing the subject of folk traditions and their rural contexts. In their own ways they are projections of an idealised past and means of resisting certain effects of capitalism. At the same time though, they are denied simplistic meaning through their representation on film. Of course these filmmakers working in the 1960s and 1970s were more concerned with the structural qualities of film and pushing boundaries, and were located in a different time. My own work is more embedded in the social experiences of place, but their influence must nonetheless be acknowledged.

The distinctions between urban and rural, the here and elsewhere, are also ones depicted through absence and longing for home in Chantal Akerman's *News From Home* (1977). This diasporic film refers to the isolating experience of city life for a female migrant, presented through fixed shots of empty city streets and a series of letters narrated by her mother. The interplays between presence and absence to evoke place and memory has also been effectively explored in Zarina Bimji's *Yellow Patch* (2011). Through detailed shots of abandoned palaces and colonial offices in Mumbai, sound compositions, stillness and suspension, the past of those spaces are imagined. She describes her approach as tactile, but acknowledges too a sense of disconnection through absence and the disjunction in time. Similarly, Emily Richardson explores the relationship between the landscape of Orford Ness and the traces of its military history through evocative shots of the landscape devoid of any people in *Cobra Mist* (2012).

The role of personal and cultural memory as a filter through which place might be seen and imagined is also a recurrent and powerful theme in the films of Thai filmmaker Apichatpong Weerasethakul (eg. *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, 2010). And in *In the Wake of a Dead Dad* (2006), Andrew Kotting returns to the places of significance in his relationship to his father and layers them with new performative meanings through the use of inflatable effigies absurdly blown up in those spaces, both recalling old memories and generating new meanings there. All of these films work with ideas of memory, loss and imagination to powerfully evoke senses of place in their own ways.

The relationship between the filmmaker, the camera and landscape is also one that has been considered through highlighting the technical possibilities of the camera as a filter through which the world is known. In Michael Snow's seminal *La Region Centrale* (1971) the robot driven camera moves through the landscape to explore the limits of the disembodied gaze. In a similar vein Tony Hill creates camera mounts that enable extraordinary movements through the landscape so places are seen and experienced from angles and perspectives far removed from conventional landscape representations (see *Downside Up*, 1985)<sup>30</sup>. In one of his films, Steven Sutcliffe shows the audience the world through the perspective of a fairground ride, as the whirling teacups on which the camera is placed spin around and around, in *The Smiths: That Joke Isn't funny Any More* (2000) All these films disorientate and challenge the viewer. In the process they disrupt conventional ways of experiencing and reading the landscape and the camera's relationship to it. Unlike my own work, the perspective is a disembodied one, questioning the limits and possibilities of the medium rather than trying to draw intimate connections between the bodies of the filmmaker and camera. Dan Shippersides, in *Coir' a' Ghrunnda* (2007), however, combines technological experimentation with an investigation into his own physical presence in the landscape by attaching a modified camera to an eight metre leash and whirling it around his own body in the landscape, creating an interesting relationship between his body, that of the camera and the landscape.

The materiality of the medium itself and its relationship to the environment is also one that has been addressed by artists such as Chris Welsby. He more formally questions the structural mechanics of the moving image and its intersection with the environment by setting up sequences of landscape shots through time-lapse photography and fixed viewpoints. The films are strongly structured technologically, yet intersect with the unpredictable elements of the weather and nature (see *Forest Bay II*). David Gatten, in *What the Water Said* (1997-98), investigated the phenomenological qualities of film by leaving it in crab traps underwater, the sea thus directly inscribing its mark on the piece and describing an intimate interrelationship between place and film. Again these are formalist approaches absorbed more in the



medium itself than social reality, but they are interesting precisely in their highlighting the materiality of film as an extension of the environment they portray and subject to the forces of nature.

Returning to embodied experience, the intimate bodily interconnections between self and landscape as experienced and imagined through film are also directly referenced in Keiller's psycho-geographic explorations in *Valtos* (1987). As he walks through a sunny valley the narrator describes how, "I walk amidst the atmospherics of my fear. Invisible forces, galvanics and radio forms gather about my head. To my eyes the waters have turned to blood, and the ground to heaps of rotting flesh. I am walking in a place that has become the inside of my own mind". Again here it is through walking and perception that the narrator comes to form some kind of union with his surroundings. It is precisely this active lived experience, as portrayed through film, that marks my work. The possibilities of merging altogether with the environment are taken one step further by Roz Cran, in *Stone* (2008), in which she physically attempts to become part of the landscape through performance, while ultimately pointing to the impossibility of doing so.

As a final point, that film contains phenomenological qualities of lived experience was also recognised back in the 1950s and 1960s by certain structural filmmakers interested in the metaphysical qualities of film. Sitney describes avant-garde American filmmakers working during that period, such as Maya Deren, as 'visionary', through their explorations into very nature of consciousness through film. *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943), for example, is as much about interior experience and the subconscious as an external reality. He also describes how Gregory Markopoulos saw picture narrative as ontologically preceding verbal narrative, investigating consciousness here through the use of editing and rhythm<sup>31</sup>. Sitney writes, "The ultimate aspiration of Markopoulos's form has been the mimesis of the human mind",

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<sup>31</sup> See for example *Psyche* (1947), *Twice a Man* (1963).

(2002: 126), and describes how over time in his work, “the distinction between imagination and actuality dissolved completely” (122)<sup>32</sup>.

Methods used by the structural filmmakers during this time that both foreground the materiality of the medium, and aim to evoke elements of human experience, seem to share some concerns with the phenomenological basis of my own research<sup>33</sup>. They express lived experience but at the same time impose a highly subjective view of the world and explore hidden, subconscious meanings that are products of the imagination. Perhaps what was missing at the time was a critical language for assessing the work. As was discussed previously, creating immersive experiences for an audience through transcendental aspirations is problematic. This has been recognised too in relation to these filmmakers making work in an earlier era, where description and experience were favoured over analysis, criticism and social engagement (see Russell, 1999: 15; Rabinovitz, 1992; Penley, 1978:292). While certain American avant-garde filmmakers from the 1950s and 60s were more concerned with aesthetics and the creation of a transcendental subject, there were however many others such as Marguerite Duras, Chantal Akerman, and Jean-Luc Godard who were more directly engaging with social issues and questions of voice and representation while still aware too of the materiality of film. The key challenge of my practice then perhaps being to find ways to combine the two approaches.

The films discussed in this section are useful in considering the various means through which place, space and embodied experience might be conveyed, scrutinised, performed, contested and imagined through film. While place and space form the backdrop to all lived and filmic experience, in the examples I have written about these themes are fore-grounded or questioned in some way. I have provided examples of films that have explored places in the context of broader global power relations, or through locally contested sites. Certain films have located themselves between places, and others have involved more intimate expressions of specific localities. Some have

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<sup>32</sup> Certain affinities between the concerns of anthropology today and experimental filmmakers of this period have recently been written about. For example, structural film’s ability to evoke non-verbal experience share similarities with ritual experiences that anthropologists strive to represent and write about. See for example, Pasqualino (2012), Schneider (2011), and Ramey (2001).

used detached tripod-bound viewpoints, while others have used hand-held techniques to evoke a more dynamic relationship with place. Some films portray people's affective relations to places, while others take more objective or detached stances. The performative inter-relationship between the body of the filmmaker, film, people and place has also been explored through actively moving through, and engaging with, spaces with the camera, and through experimenting with the materiality of the medium. Some of the films are products of extended periods of time spent in certain localities, while others express fleeting encounters with places. Each of these films, in its own way, comprises a form of sensual and embodied encounter between people, camera and place. The intentional choices and subjective viewpoints presented exist within a broader politics of representation, whether overtly acknowledged by the filmmaker or not.

Finally, having presented an overview of films that broadly deal with place, locality, and embodiment, I want to assert that *Folk in Her Machine* offers a unique contribution to these fields, particularly through its gendered perspectives on place and ritual. In the above section I have cited certain female filmmakers whose work relates to themes of place and belonging, particularly Margaret Tait, Chantal Akerman, Ester Johnson, Emily Richardson, and Sarah Turner. I have also discussed female filmmakers interested in embodiment and the body, most notably Sarah Pucill. In terms of ritual representation, Maya Deren's work has been highly influential. Yet there clearly remains a distinct lack of work that self-consciously explores female and feminist embodied experiences of place, belonging, and ritual in the contemporary English landscape. Perhaps the most important voice to have emerged in recent years in relation to place has been that of Patrick Keiller, to whom my work is likely to be compared. While I use certain static camera shots and a fictional narrator, the work strongly diverges from Keiller's disembodied perspective by instead drawing close to lived experience. Through the rich sensual presentation of texture, colour, and close-ups in my work, alongside hand-held camerawork, and slow motion footage, I critically explore the intimate and entangled inter-relationships between filmmaker, film, and the world. The use of female narration also differs in tone and perspective from Keiller's voiceovers, a point to which I will return later when discussing the use of voiceover in the next chapter.

It is mindful of the conceptual approaches I have chosen to frame my own work - embodiment and tactility, performance, experimental ethnography and auto-ethnography – and aware of the politics of representation, that I will now move on to explore the techniques and strategies I used in my fieldwork and filmmaking. Once I have provided more background context of the traditions themselves, I will build upon the ideas I have developed so far to explain and expand upon my research design, filmmaking, fieldwork and the process of creating the film.

## **Chapter 2: Research context and methods**

### **Overview**

I have so far discussed the themes of embodied experience and performance both in considering peoples inter-relationships with place, and in conceptualising film. I have drawn upon philosophical and anthropological thought to conceive of the world as known and understood through lived bodily experience, and framed the performative rituals as forms of place-making or symbolic emplacement in local landscapes. I also then considered the ways in which places might be presented, re-presented and re-imagined through the process of filmmaking, and through the inter-connecting bodies of filmmaker, film, subjects and audience.

While the primary medium used in this research was film, other techniques that I loosely refer to as ethnographic methods were employed to gain an understanding of the social contexts in which I was working. While the research explores the imaginative and performative qualities of place and ritual through filmic experience, respect is retained in the process for the empirical. Methods characteristic of ethnography such as participant observation, note-taking, formal and informal interviews were thus a means through which to elicit local understandings and perceptions, both explicit and tacit, of place, ritual and their inter-relations. Some of these investigations were used directly in the film, such as through the interview voices, but they were also a means of framing the broader contexts of the rituals developed through the research period.

While these approaches were designed as part of an enquiry into subjects' lived experiences, the research remains suspicious of any rigid methodology as the basis for unveiling documentary 'truths', or the possibilities of objective representation. I use the concept of participant observation, for example, as much to highlight the limits of my own experiences, and my own inability to fully participate at the male-dominated rituals as to explore shared experiences. As Marks recognised, embodied perception can also refer to the limits to one's experiences in the world, for "the body encodes power relations somatically." (Marks, 2000: 152). The film addresses certain aspects of social realities and the potential for their transmission through embodied approaches. But the aim is equally to foreground the research as performative

encounter, to unsettle certain senses of place, and to explore the possibilities of experimental ethnography.

The practical stages of making the film were ones in which processes and experiences overlapped. Periods of filming and editing were closely interwoven, and in reality there is no clear distinction between home and away, inner and outer worlds, self and other. The writing for this next section nonetheless explores the interplay between 'experience' and 'interpretation' characteristic of an ethnographic approach as a means to consider the various phases involved in the research. Once I have explored the wider background of the traditions themselves, I thus consider the ways I conducted my 'fieldwork' and collected audio-visual materials, before later going on to discuss the interpretation and assembly of the resultant audio-visual materials into the film.

In Part 1 of this chapter, I start by providing more background information on Mayday in Padstow and Haxey Hood. I describe the traditions themselves, and provide brief historical and socio-economic contexts of the customs and localities in order to contextualise the research. Before embarking on this project I had already travelled around the country in my camper van to many different folk traditions photographing and filming them. From the outset I was intrigued and compelled by the events, and many of the questions and themes of the research surfaced as a result of those initial experiences. I have been to many other folk traditions over the years, such as the Tar Barrel Rolling in Ottery St. Mary, Allendale's Fire Ceremony in Northumberland, The Mari Llwyd in Llantrisant and Llangynwyd, in South Wales, Hallaton Bottle Kicking And Hare Pie Scramble in Leicestershire and Abbots Bromley Horn Dance in Staffordshire. And yet, as the narrator in my film states, it was Mayday in Padstow and Haxey Hood that had the most profound impact on me and where I felt compelled to return (see film, 03:10). I witnessed a great passion and intensity at these particular events and large-scale community participation. It was evident from the outset that these customs were of huge significance for local communities, and in Padstow in particular, this was clearly related to the wider politics of place. These two sites seemed best suited to an experiential study and a consideration of the rituals as forms of place-making.

In Part 2, I then proceed to explain approaches taken to ‘experience’ in the field. I describe the methods I chose in collecting information about my research locations, loosely framed as ethnographic research methods. These are discussed in relation to the politics and ethics of my fieldwork and documentary filmmaking, and the fieldwork is framed as a form of performative encounter. I explore in more detail the camera techniques and strategies I used to represent and explore the experiential qualities of place and ritual through film. I then specifically consider my approach to audio recordings in the field, adopting similar embodied and tactile approaches to those used with my camera.

In Part 3, I consider approaches I took to interpreting the audio-visual materials I collected in my two research sites, in London and on various travels. Certain intentional filmic strategies are used to further address and highlight the performative possibilities of film and some of the problems of documentary representation. I apply my ideas surrounding experimental ethnography here to consider the ways in which lived experience might be fragmented, performed and imagined through the construction of the film. Included in this discussion will be a consideration of auto-ethnography and the use of voiceover in the film. Other processes and strategies I used such as re-filming, editing and creating the soundtrack will finally also be explored as means through which to present, perform and disrupt documentary ‘truths’.

## **Part 1: Context**

### **Padstow’s ‘Obby ‘Oss**

Mayday in Padstow is a hugely significant annual event in the life of the local Padstow community. It is also a period that sees the reconstitution of the wider community, and many who live elsewhere travel ‘home’ from all over the world to participate in the festivities.

Celebrated on 1<sup>st</sup> May, with the arrival of Summer, the folk tradition is Padstow “*en fete*, Carnival, a period of transition or liminality, a moment ‘in and out of time’, and ‘in and out of the secular social structure’” (Gilligan, 1990:178, quoting Turner,

1974:82). The day focuses around two 'Obby 'Osses; the 'original' Old 'Oss, and the Blue Ribbon 'Oss, introduced after the First World War. The 'Osses themselves comprise large hoops of wood, three metres in diameter with holes in the middle, through which a man puts his head. Attached to this base is a horse's head and real horse's hair tail, and below hangs a black skirt made of sail canvas. The man inside the 'Oss then wears a hat, a conical headpiece with a fierce mask painted red and white. The honour of dancing under the 'Oss is one reserved for select local men, and in the case of the Old 'Oss, strictly for those with certain birth or ancestral rights. On Mayday both 'Osses can be seen twirling and cavorting their ways around the town to the sound of beating drums and accordions, led by a 'teaser', a person prancing in front with a club. Every so often the music slows to a dirge-like pace and the 'Oss 'dies' on the ground, before leaping back to life again as the music swells once more.



Film still, *Folk in Her Machine* (2013).

Mayday officially starts at midnight on 30<sup>th</sup> April, when a large crowd gathers outside the Golden Lion pub, and at the stroke of midnight, sings the 'night song' unaccompanied, before the party walks around the town singing outside the houses of various local families. Early the following morning, local men from the Old 'Oss party cut down boughs of sycamore and decorate the town with them. At ten and eleven o'clock, musicians from the Blue Ribbon 'Oss and the Old 'Oss parties then file out of their respective headquarters to the tune of the May song, and await the much



anticipated 'Oss, who bursts out to a great cheer for the first dance of Spring. During the rest of the day, the two 'Oss parties walk and dance their ways around the town led by the bands, who hypnotically bang drums and repeatedly perform the May song 'Unite and Unite' throughout the day. In the evening the event usually culminates with the two parties meeting around the Maypole, (a clash where often the underlying tensions between the two groups are evident) before the 'Osses are finally laid to rest in their stables around 9pm to the melancholic sound of the 'Farewell Song.'

Here the existence of two rival groups in the tradition needs mentioning. This forms another boundary within the tradition, additional to the insider/outsider dynamic. Sociologist Laurent Fournier, referring more generally to rituals and traditions, noted that these kinds of divisions could be seen to create structure and heighten 'dramatic encounters' (2009:207). And for ethnologist Neill Martin, whether performed dramas or physical contests, they "possess an underlying co-operative impulse which belies their surface divisiveness" (2007:172). In the case of Padstow, the presence of the two 'Osses represents conflict as well as cohesion, and has historically expressed social, moral and religious differences (Gilligan, 1990:183). The Old 'Oss today is referred to as the 'original' and 'authentic' one, with claims to the oldest ancestral links to the town resting with a few Old 'Oss families, whose 'right' it is therefore to participate. Gilligan notes, however, that the two parties today represent less of a conflict of interest between two groups and more 'two sides of a contradiction'. He writes, "in order to maintain the traditional Padsta (the Old 'Oss), Padsta has had to change (the 'new', Blue Ribbon 'Oss). Both the old and the new have their 'Osses, and both are genuinely Padsta, but the conflict between them symbolizes the contradiction between 'maintenance' and 'adaptation', between 'tradition' and 'change'" (Gilligan:183). While it was beyond the scope of the film to explore in detail the dynamics between the two 'Oss parties, these factors nonetheless highlight the complex boundaries, hierarchies and relational dynamics that exist within, as well as between places. Most nonetheless would acknowledge that despite there being two 'Osses, the majority of locals feel united on this day in their identity as Padstonians, despite some internal rivalries.

While Mayday itself is at the centre of the tradition, there are also many important stages of preparation and activity in the run-up to the day, participated in by various

community members. Most are themselves forms of socialisation. They include the painting of the 'Osses, the putting up of the maypole and flags, decorating the town with greenery, alongside private family preparations such as collecting flowers and visiting graves of loved ones. During the weeks before, musicians also gather in local pubs and 'strike-up' by playing folk songs and the May song, creating an atmosphere of excitement and anticipation as the day once again draws near. The day after Mayday is also very significant. The town gathers once more to drink and recount their experiences from the previous day. A few days later the maypole is taken down for another year, and the town gradually returns to its normal rhythms.

## **History**

As with many folk traditions, much of the history and origins of this ritual are unknown. In a 1913 lecture, Peter Thurstan, Cornish historian, pointed out that the 8<sup>th</sup> May was the old Celtic Belthane, the celebration of the coming in of Summer by the lighting of fires. His view was that this festival was most likely later combined with Morris May games and other May customs which were popular in Cornwall in the Middle Ages, to form the basis of today's festivities (in Rawe, 1999:10).

In this lecture, Peter comments, "I believe the (Padstow) Hobby Horse...[and the Helston Furry Dance alike] to be ancient pagan festivals of revival and fruitfulness, one of those forms of magic, not by any means implying the notion of invariable cause and effect, but an attempt to express in ritual the emotions and desires – and on this have been grafted on the one hand folk-lore and on the other Christian ceremonies, the history being still further confused by mistaken efforts of well-meaning persons to remove elements regarded by them as coarse." (Peter, 1913 in Rawe, 1999:10).

Peter also notes that the 'Oss itself makes its first appearance through an arch of sycamore or May leaves. In a similarly romantic vein he states, "This is basically a religious rite, a fertility transference by which the wearer expects some power of the new blooms and leaves to pass into himself. So it is evident that Mayday at Padstow was originally part of a country-wide festival for Summer's coming" (Rawe, 1999: 10).

While this writing clearly combines more factual evidence with the romantic spirit of many folklorists at the time<sup>34</sup>, many of these theories and sentiments are interwoven in the ways the events are perceived, imagined and performed by locals today, so are relevant in considering the appropriation of history in today's contexts. This study is interested in how certain versions of history are then passed down, imagined and re-performed. They also highlight importantly the interplay between the outside world and this 'local' tradition. While boundaries are strongly drawn between insiders and outsiders, non-locals have clearly helped shape and define the event in many ways. According to historian Ronald Hutton, Thurston's suggestion that this was an ancient pagan custom generated new interest in the tradition and also helped launch it as a tourist attraction. (1996:82).

In terms of the 'Obby 'Oss itself, hobby horses formed part of Morris traditions (integral elements also including a May Pole and dancers), and there is evidence that a hobby horse custom existed in eighteenth and nineteenth century West Cornwall. This was most likely made from a real horse's skull, and like the 'Obby 'Oss, it captured girls under its skirts which many see as evidence of it being a fertility rite<sup>35</sup>. The earliest written reference to a Hobby Horse is in the old Cornish drama *Bewnans Meriasek* (the life of Meriasek) written in 1502 (in Rawe, 1999:10). The horse is also often referred to as an 'ancient' fertility symbol, with origins thus going back much further. Folklorist Alan Harlow in an article entitled 'May Rites', believes May Games to have ancient origins<sup>36</sup>. He states that the hobby horse should not be confused with the semi-comical horse of the Morris dance. It is "a wild horse, a black demon-cum-vegetation spirit and the symbol of male fertility". He also notes that black has always been associated with rites of fertility (in Rawe, 1999:12). While again there is no evidence here, the 'Oss today is certainly seen much more as a powerful and intensely

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<sup>34</sup> In the fashion of anthropologist James Frazer in 'The Golden Bough', published in 1890, whose claims are now widely refuted. For more contemporary interpretations of folklore read more in their current community contexts see, for example, Trubshaw (2002).

<sup>35</sup> The myth persists today that if a woman is trapped under the skirt of the 'Oss, she will become pregnant.

<sup>36</sup> Harlow ambitiously references links to palaeolithic cave paintings (in Rawe, 1999:12).

masculine creature than a source of comedy, although is still sometimes ridiculed from the outside. However, despite this seemingly archaic symbolic presence in Padstow today, the earliest record of the tradition dates from 1803, when the horse with a man inside splashed water over the crowds from a pool on the edge of the town (Polwhele in Cawte, 1999: 16). Hutton concludes, as have other modern scholars, that there is no evidence to assign the tradition a greater age than the late eighteenth century (1996:82).

Layered on top of these speculations are many other myths and interpretations, both related to the 'Oss and other elements of the tradition. A popular story is that of 'Aunt Ursula Birdhood and the Frightening of the French'. It is said that during one of the wars against France, the men were away, and a French man o'war boat appeared off the cliffs at nearby Stepper Point. The women, under Aunt Ursula's directions, wrapped themselves in red cloaks, and, with the 'Oss leading them to the banging of drums, marched up onto the cliffs and scared the French away, who believed they saw an army ahead led by the devil (Rawe, 1999:13). As for the mask itself, it retains remarkable similarity to masks found in Africa and parts of Asia. This has caused many to believe it most likely came from ships voyaging abroad, and therefore linking to the specific historical naval links between Padstow and elsewhere.

While all this history alludes to the mysterious past of the tradition 'lost in the mists of time', this imagined symbolism sits alongside the present day symbolic acting out of the community and its boundaries. The historical meanings are also used to some extent towards this end, to authenticate claims to the past<sup>37</sup>. Despite then the often highly romanticised interpretations of this tradition, it is still by no means a recently 'invented' one<sup>38</sup>, but assertions of "the unchanging continuity of the event and that of the town's past, belies the change, innovation and incorporation of external influences at various times in the history of both. In equal measure, the persistence and development of both the settlement and the enactment of Mayday are the result

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<sup>37</sup> One example of this is members of the 'Old 'Oss party claiming old family links to the tradition, but clearly not all links are as old as imagined, as some of the very un-Cornish surnames such as McOwen, Morrissey testify. These families came to Cornwall in the nineteenth century.

<sup>38</sup> For a discussion of invented traditions, see Hobsbawm and Ranger, (1983).

of Padstow's *engagement with* the outside world and *not* its isolation from it." (Gilligan, 1990:177).

### **The wider Padstow context**

Gilligan conducted an anthropological study of Padstow in the 1980s. He attempted to emphasise both the significance of the local historical perspective and the wider regional context of changing labour patterns in understanding the community there. He describes Padstow as having a chequered history. Each period of prosperity since its emergence as a trading settlement in the medieval period has been relatively short lived, replaced by new waves of industry and employment. By the mid 1800s, the town was at the height of its commercial success as a shipbuilding and trading port, later a major national fishing station until decline in the 1950s, followed by a period of post-war house-building which provided new employment opportunities, albeit short-lived ones. Then came the advent of mass tourism to the town in the 1960s, which continues to form a central part of Padstow's activities today. Trading, shipbuilding, fishing, construction and tourism have thus all formed part of the community historically, each declining and leaving traces of residual activity. Local labour has rarely in recent history provided stable employment for more than a few (Gilligan, 1990: 166-171).

This dependence on largely seasonal industries has continued to the present day, with mainly casual employment in formal and informal activities, and much of this focused around tourism. In his research, Gilligan notes a clear demarcation of boundaries between local Padstonians and those they term 'outsiders' who have come to live and work there from 'upcountry', bringing with them the power to invest in and transform the town. They are also perceived to have brought their own urban values with them and imposed them on a rural community (173). While visitors have always come to the town, formerly as temporary workers, the recent wave of tourism is seen more as connected to the much more problematic issue of those who have come to stay and 'taken over'. Since Gilligan's study, the strong presence of Rick Stein

in the town in an age of celebrity culture<sup>39</sup>, combined with the popularity of Cornish coastal resorts in general, has meant the continued influx of tourists and second-home owners. This has exacerbated further the sense of powerlessness for locals, and the predominant feeling that the town is no longer their own. The 'old' Padstonians largely now live in the top part of town, with second homeowners occupying the vast majority of the old part of town<sup>40</sup>.

Cornwall remains one of the poorest regions in the UK, and the low local wages mean that for younger generations it has become impossible for many to afford a mortgage. While this research is more interested in local perceptions than concrete facts and statistics, media coverage and the publication of figures nonetheless may have helped reinforce local resentment towards outsiders. In a Sunday Times newspaper article published in 2003 entitled, 'Prices double in seaside house boom', Padstow was cited as having the highest housing price rises in the country, which rose by 103% in the two years running up to the article, at a rate of more than three times the national average. In 2000, it is claimed that ninety eight per cent of all houses sold in Padstow were to second homeowners. Many of these were bought by people from the southeast, who benefited from big bonuses and soaring property prices in the late 1990s (Winnett, 2003). In the Cornish Guardian in 2004, the second home issues and the local feeling of dispossession were summarised under the headline, 'Ghettos for the rich and famous'<sup>41</sup>. The presence of great affluence in the town has made clear the class differences and economic disparities between Padstonians and those who have made money elsewhere. Many also complain that the local shops do not serve the community. In the 1950s there were many local-owned shops and amenities serving the population, but now all cater solely for tourists, with the opening of Tesco in 2000 at the top end of town ensuring the death of the last of the local trade.

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<sup>39</sup> The town is often referred to as 'Padstein' owing to the chef's influence.

<sup>40</sup> Despite these realities, it is also true that many local Padstonian families moved out of their rented properties in the centre of the town through choice following the post-war construction of the council estates at the top of town. The old houses in the centre at that time mainly had outdoor toilets and were damp, making the new-builds appealing.

<sup>41</sup> Quote from Cornish Guardian, 25.11.2004.



Film still, *Folk in Her Machine* (2013).

What is clear from old photographs of Mayday is that at the turn of the century, and at later moments, the tradition was participated in by few and arguably in danger of dying out. Even in 1949, a spirit of openness is clear in Padstonian Claude Berry's book 'Cornwall', "We at Padstow are quite unself-conscious and informal in our festivity. Anybody and everybody can join in" (Berry, in Rawe, 1999:5). The need to draw boundaries with the outside world and the very different context today can be seen in the light of all the changes that have taken place.

Today's attitude is summed up by David Champion, writing in the Padstow Echo magazine in 1975:

"In the Spring a bird called the cuckoo arrives on these shores. Being a rather big and intelligent bird, it takes over the nests of others by throwing them out. It then settles and stays, making much noise in the announcement of its arrival. Let us hope that in future years the cuckoo stays away, or finds another nest." (cited in Gilligan, 1990:176).

## Haxey Hood

Haxey Hood, a mid-Winter festival, takes place on 6<sup>th</sup> January every year in the North Lincolnshire village of Haxey. The game itself, as with Padstow, is a moment of liminality, inside and outside of time and everyday social structures. It draws large crowds of people and many return from elsewhere to take part, although returning home is not on such a great scale as in Padstow. Unlike Padstow, however, apart from the selected group of Boggins, who play the central roles, taking part is open to all. The tradition has at its core thirteen officials who have gained the honor of performing the tradition by being selected to take part. Many of these men have family connections to the tradition, although a few are from families who have moved to the village more recently. In charge of the ritual is the Lord of the Hood, the Chief Boggin, ten other Boggins and a Fool. The fool is dressed in garments covered in shreds and patches, and has a blackened face, and the rest wear red jackets or jumpers and hats decorated with flowers. The ritual commences on New Year's Eve when the men retrieve the hood from the pub it has been kept in since the previous year. In the following week they visit the pubs and houses in the neighbouring villages, singing traditional songs and collecting money. This tour culminates on 'Hood Eve', when the Boggins visit local pubs, with many locals gathered to see them and sing along.



Film still, *Folk in Her Machine*, (2013).



The main event takes place the following day, on 6<sup>th</sup> January. After a tour of the village pubs, and the 'blacking up' of the Fool's face, he then tries to escape and is caught by the other Boggins. They carry him to a large stone in front of the church, where he performs a speech of welcome, while the Boggins light a fire of straw behind him to 'smoke' him. The crowd then follows the Fool up to Haxey Hill, where the game takes place.

After a children's version of the game, the main part of the game commences. The 'Hood', a leather baton, is thrown up, caught and fought over by a heaving mass of around three hundred people. The Hood must not be thrown or run with. It must instead be pushed to the winning pub, or 'swayed'<sup>42</sup>. Ostensibly the struggle is between the men of Haxey and those from the neighboring village of Westwoodside, and the goals are four pubs, three of which are located in Haxey. The game is officially over when the landlord of the winning pub touches the Hood. It is then kept safely behind the bar until it is retrieved the following New Year's Eve.

While in Padstow oppositions are created through the tradition with more complex boundaries that serve to include and exclude, here the opposing two 'sides' are very sporting and generally limited only to the game itself. Neill Martin, referring to guising traditions and contests in Scotland as 'dramatic encounters', observes that there is an underlying solidarity at work in many rituals that involve opposing sides, or appear on the surface as divisive (2007, cited in Fournier, 2009: 207). The need to draw boundaries is perhaps less pronounced and politically charged than in Padstow, but more subtle hierarchies and boundaries nonetheless exist. Certain Boggins are always at the centre of the game, for example, guarding the Hood, and only males are permitted to participate. It is also claimed that only through intimately knowing the landscape and techniques of the game can it be played successfully. One local story tells of the year a whole rugby team came and pushed, but was no match for the local men who were experienced in the game and knew the terrain.

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<sup>42</sup> This mass of men pushing for their local team is known locally as the 'sway'. Participation varies from year to year, particularly influenced by the weather.

Mike Pearson, performance artist and academic, explores his own performative relationship to his native North Lincolnshire in his publication 'In Comes I'. He spent time travelling around his native county, considering the interrelationship between place, lived experience and history. He sums up Haxey Hood through a perspective akin to my research, through which engagements with place and landscape comprise forms of integrated, embodied knowledge. His description of the intimate visceral experience is one in which; "the Swaymen know this flat empty land through feel rather than perspective; any contours are *felt* not measured; landscape as *somatic* space. And they know it at the most intimate of scales, in close-up, as slope and angle and façade, as ground underfoot, as slight advantage, as the best place to achieve this or that, as the places where danger lurks." (Pearson, 2006: 157).

## History

The origins of the game are unknown and the history unclear. The romantic story of Lady de Mowbray set in the fourteenth century is the one most commonly told by locals<sup>43</sup>, although there is no historical evidence for this explanation. Alternative suggestions connect this tradition to ancient pagan rituals, with the smoking of the Fool containing "echoes of purgation and expulsion of scapegoats" (Pearson, 2006: 156, referring to Rudkin's assertions, 1936). According to Rudkin, he used to be swung on a rope over a fire. 'Plough-bullocks' also went around the village at this season (Pearson:156-7).<sup>44</sup> The participants in this ritual were also known as Boggins,

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<sup>43</sup> "It so happened on old Christmas Day that a young lady (the daughter of the then Mowbray) was riding across the Meeres...to the church [when] a gale of wind blew off her hood. Twelve farming men who were working in the field saw the occurrence and ran to gather up the hood, and in such earnest were they that the lady took so much amusement at the scene, she forbade her own attendants joining in the pursuit. The hood being captured, returned and replaced on the lady's head, she expressed her obligations to the men, giving them each some money, and promised a piece of land to throw up a hood annually on old Christmas Day; she also ordered that the twelve men engaged to contest the race for the hood should be clothed in scarlet jerkins and velvet caps, the hood to be thrown up in the same place as the one where she lost hers...The quantity of land left by Lady Mowbray was forty acres, which are known by the name of the Hoodlands...the Boggons' dresses are made from its proceeds". (in Newall, 1858, cited in Pearson, 2006:156).

<sup>44</sup> This was part of the Plough Monday custom in which a plough was taken around the neighborhood to raise money.

and were known to have taken part in the Hood. What is clear is that the ritual today contains within it various separate mid-Winter customs.

These stories all connect to the local historical context, and are in this case related to this area as a farming community, in the same way that in Padstow much of the lore relates to the sea and to local history and geography. These stories and historical links are thus important ways in which the past is remembered, performed, imagined and invented through the traditions.

As well as the stories surrounding origins, there are also many tales and ‘whodunnits’ that form part of the Hood’s folklore, such as the times the Hood has disappeared or been lost. For example, in 1943, the Hood disappeared and was smuggled away, and there have been various other similar incidents since (see Hornby, 2008:67). The horror felt by locals when the baton has been lost and the desire to protect it and keep it within the village’s boundaries again serves to reinforce the close interconnections between geographical surroundings, the local community and senses of belonging.

### **The wider Haxey context**

As with Padstow, the changing nature of employment and shifts in the community’s former identity might help explain the increased popularity of the game in recent times, and the deep pride attached to the tradition. The game is conceived as an important means of engaging with and imagining local landscapes, and connecting with other community members. Here this is played out through intense physicality, danger and camaraderie.

Geographically, Haxey and Westwoodside are located in an area of land called the Isle of Axholme, a somewhat unremarkable, flat, open-skied landscape with a few undulating hills such as the one between these two villages where the Hood commences. Once surrounded by fenland, it was drained and reclaimed by Dutch immigrants in the seventeenth century. After the drainage of the land, arable farming, particularly of root crops, became important, and continues to be so to the present day. Agriculture has historically been an important part of the area’s identity (see also

Sitch and Williams, 1989), and these strong historical connections are interesting when considering the Hood today as played out in the local landscape.

Today, there is little industry in the parish apart from agriculture. Many of the traditional farms are now operated by contractors, and there are few employees compared with the past. Locally skilled craftsmen work in the area for the building trade and there are a significant number of home workers. However Haxey and Westwoodside are today primarily dormitory villages for those who work in Doncaster, Scunthorpe, or Gainsborough. Local shops also only provide convenience shopping, the vast majority travelling to these towns to do their main shop<sup>45</sup>. (Haxey Parish Plan, 2010:6<sup>46</sup>). These factors contribute to village life being very different to times gone by, providing few excuses for the community to gather together.



Film still, *Folk in Her Machine* (2013).

Arguably, the unique identities of the villages are now marked only by the Hood, in places that are otherwise indistinct and marginalised commuter territories. Young people there complain of boredom, and drugs have become an issue. The game is not just a symbolic means of connecting community and landscape. It comprises a very

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<sup>45</sup> These towns are all around 15 miles away.

<sup>46</sup> <http://haxeyparish.org.uk/download/Haxey%20Parish%20Plan.pdf>

physical form of engagement with fields and landscapes that once would have been worked by the local men. This game could thus be seen as a form of place-making, of acting out an old ritual, and of remembering relatives from previous generations, on land that on a daily basis is merely glimpsed from a passing car for most.

Anthropologist Constance Classen uses examples such as sports and warfare to demonstrate the cohesive power of touch, capable of expressing ideals of manliness, establishing social hierarchies, and fostering “potent bonds of masculine community”. That permissible touch among men is greatly restricted in our culture (2005:155-6), might help to explain the poignancy of these intense forms of contact on these ritual days. But this contact is also a form of physical engagement with the earth. Just as men rarely touch each other in our culture, in the Haxey context men rarely make contact with local landscapes today, where previous generations used to farm the land and partake in an active community life. Arguably the physicality of the rituals, the sinking into the mud, getting stuck, pushing and pulling over the terrain is also then a means of linking people with place through tactile engagement.

This game also involves very real danger. A common theme mentioned is that of health and safety, perceived as being the only real threat to today’s event. In interviews, some men mentioned this ritual as being a kind of clenched fist in the face of the authorities, with the increased legislation and restrictions imposed on the nation’s lives generally (for example, see film, 16:58-17:41). Similar circumstances have led to Gloucestershire’s cheese rolling custom to be banned altogether since 2010, although locals have defiantly continued each year since. Increasing problems have also been encountered by organisers of other hazardous customs such as Ottery St. Mary’s Tar Bar Rolling on 5<sup>th</sup> November, in Devon. In Haxey Hood, the element of risk shared by participants, who all look out for each other, creates a situation of reliance and trust that is said to bond them. It is local people who are in control, who are empowered and defined through their own actions and rules rather than those of outsiders. The game also costs nothing, has no sponsorship and no commercial elements, again in stark contrast to much of daily life. While the case of Haxey is very different to that of Padstow, broader conditions and legislative controls beyond the localities themselves have affected the contexts of the rituals themselves, and make their independent natures appealing.

The tradition has also been confronted by local challenges. In 2011, a land dispute arose when a local 'gypsy' was asked to replace his barbed wire fence, in case the sway passed that way and caused injury. The angry man appearing in the pub in the run-up to 'Hood Eve' announcing that he would put an axe through anyone's head if they dared try to take the fence down. This then evoked angry local responses. Earlier last year, more problems arose as the landowner of the 'Hood field' built a quad bike track on the site. It was bulldozed down in the night by an angry local. The dispute forms part of an ongoing concern that the man responsible is hoping to develop the currently protected land. It is in these contexts of contestation that the game and the land where it is performed, described by some as almost sacred to locals, come to take on an even greater significance in the face of threat. This event appeared in the local news and a Facebook page, entitled 'Stop the Haxey Hood Field becoming a Quad track' has also been created<sup>47</sup>. These forms of opposition and contestation form part of the ways places are valued, imagined, protected, and performed.

## **Part 2: Experience and methods 'in the field'**

### **Fieldwork: techniques and politics**

The previous section has already described the backdrops to the traditions and the contexts in which my research took place. Much of this information was gathered through the time I spent in both places, through encounters, interviews, informal conversations and observations. I now want to describe some of the methods I used, influenced by ethnographic research techniques, to gather the materials for my own work.

One of the techniques characteristic of ethnographic research is 'participant observation', defined by Kathleen and Billie DeWalt as "a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture" (2002:1). This approach requires collecting 'data' in

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<sup>47</sup> These events were recounted to me by Boggins in informal conversations and via telephone communication once I was back in London.

naturalistic settings, and is generally credited to anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski. While others before him had ventured out into the field to conduct their studies, his emphasis on everyday interactions and observations came to form the foundational technique of participant observation (3). These experiences are then conventionally recorded as field-notes, often then supplemented by informal and formal interviews to cross check information and develop a deeper understanding of the field of enquiry.

These ethnographic methods all rely on the primacy of lived experience as the basis for empirical knowledge. They influenced the ways I approached my film and other embodied experiences 'in the field'. While the research explores the interplay between lived experience and filmic representation, my own bodily experiences independent of those of the camera were also important means to learn about my research settings, explore meanings through social encounters, and to then help frame and further develop the filmic research.

Despite drawing on the term 'participant observation' broadly to discuss the collection of materials during my research, I express caution from the outset. Malinowski writes that the goal of ethnography is, "to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize *his* vision of *his* world" (Malinowski, 1922 in Spradley, 1980:3). These words were written many years ago, in an entirely different context to my own study. Yet something of the spirit of his words still arguably permeates much of anthropological research. I would not make such claims to be able to fully see through the eyes of others in my research, or make such simplistic distinctions between my own experiences and those of subjects. While I am interested in understanding local viewpoints, my study equally addresses the performative inter-relations *between* myself, camera and subjects. It opens gaps for fictions and uses reflexivity to explore the politics of representation. Contemporary approaches to ethnography have increasingly recognised the constructed, inter-subjective, performed and partial nature of anthropological studies (Jenkins, 1994; Marcus, 1990; Clifford, 1986). My aim was never thus full 'immersion' in my field of enquiry, and neither was this possible in these contexts. Instead, I prefer to frame my research methods as forms of performative encounter. These encounters, as discussed in Chapter 1, reflect and express the politics of place, lived experience, and of equal

significance, the politics of research and representation. I return to employ Pratt's term "contact zone" to contextualise these encounters as always existing within hierarchical relational fields. Clifford writes, "'culture' is always relational, an inscription of communicative processes that exist, historically, *between* subjects in relations of power" (1986:15, emphasis in original). Likewise, the process of documentary filmmaking exists at these boundaries, always caught up in the politics of representation.

Built into my discussion of the performative in Chapter 1 was the assumption that people adopt different roles in everyday life, and so too the ways they behave in front of the camera involves the performance of other roles. Likewise, the role of the researcher and filmmaker is a performative one. For anthropologist George Marcus, the shifting position of the ethnographer over time has led to what he terms a "circumstantial activism", which involves "the construction of a persona or identity both in fieldwork and in writing." (1999:17). Marcus goes on to state that "the anthropologist is not the presumed outsider that he or she was in traditional research...Having to shift personal positions in relation to one's subjects and other active discourses in fields that overlap with one's own" means there is a political or 'activist' dimension to all fieldwork (17-18). The gender of the researcher is just one of these roles that is assumed as a performed construction (following Butler, 2006). Feminist geographer Gillian Rose writes, "The ways we choose to demarcate our position in relation to others speaks of the possibilities and impossibilities of the sexed subject – of exposing the limits of the performance, the rules of the game." (1993:5). There is thus an active critical potential within the performative, through which, as sociologist Erving Goffman recognised, the self is constantly re-created through our interactions with others (Goffman, 1959: 252-3). The creation of my own persona, while overtly fictionalised through the voiceover in the script, was thus a process that self-consciously began in the field and formed part of the whole research process. Inevitably my position as female/'outsider'/city dweller/middle class affected the outcome of my research. But these performed positions (never intended to be essentialised), were ones that also became the basis for challenging assumptions and performing my own subjective version of the rituals. Reflexivity and ethical questions were integral to every stage. They informed the ways I presented



myself in the field, but required responsibility in the ways I then chose to *re-present* others through film.

The basis of my encounters in Haxey and Padstow stemmed from attempting to draw close to the lived experiences of people who resided there, or who travelled back. I have now been to Mayday in Padstow a total of six times and Haxey Hood over four consecutive years and stayed at both places for varying periods beyond the days themselves<sup>48</sup>. Between 2009 and 2012 I spent a total of 10 weeks in Padstow and between 2010 and 2013, and 6 weeks in Haxey<sup>49</sup>. These experiences formed the grounds for then commenting upon, performing and exploring certain themes through film. In particular I used everyday conversation with people I met as a means to learn more about the rituals and the broader contexts of life in both places. I also observed and took part in local social events. I made notes throughout the times spent in each place on my observations, encounters and experiences, which were then used as a means to develop ideas and identify important or recurring themes. In relation to the rituals, in Haxey, I attended meetings with the Boggins prior to the day itself. I followed them around in their mini-bus in the week running up to the main day in their tour of local pubs and houses. I also met many locals in the four village pubs, one of which I stayed in each time I was there. In Padstow, I stayed on the local campsite each year. I went with women to collect flowers for the maypole, and witnessed the ritual of the maypole being erected and put down over five seasons. I accompanied men as they cut sycamore from the trees to decorate the town. And I attended a private all-male meeting in which the Blue Ribbon 'Oss was being re-painted. I also continually inter-acted with many locals in the pubs, on the streets and in private houses. While I recorded many of these events on film, others I attended without my camera, and therefore used my own sensory awareness to connect to and imagine these experiences.

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<sup>48</sup> I attended Mayday in Padstow in 2005, and then 2008-2012, and Haxey Hood 2010-2013.

<sup>49</sup> For the first 16 months of my research I was based in the anthropology department at Goldsmiths University where they strongly encouraged me to only look at one fieldsite and conduct an in-depth study there. So for the first year I only focused on Padstow before expanding my research to include Haxey when I moved to the film department at London College of Communication.

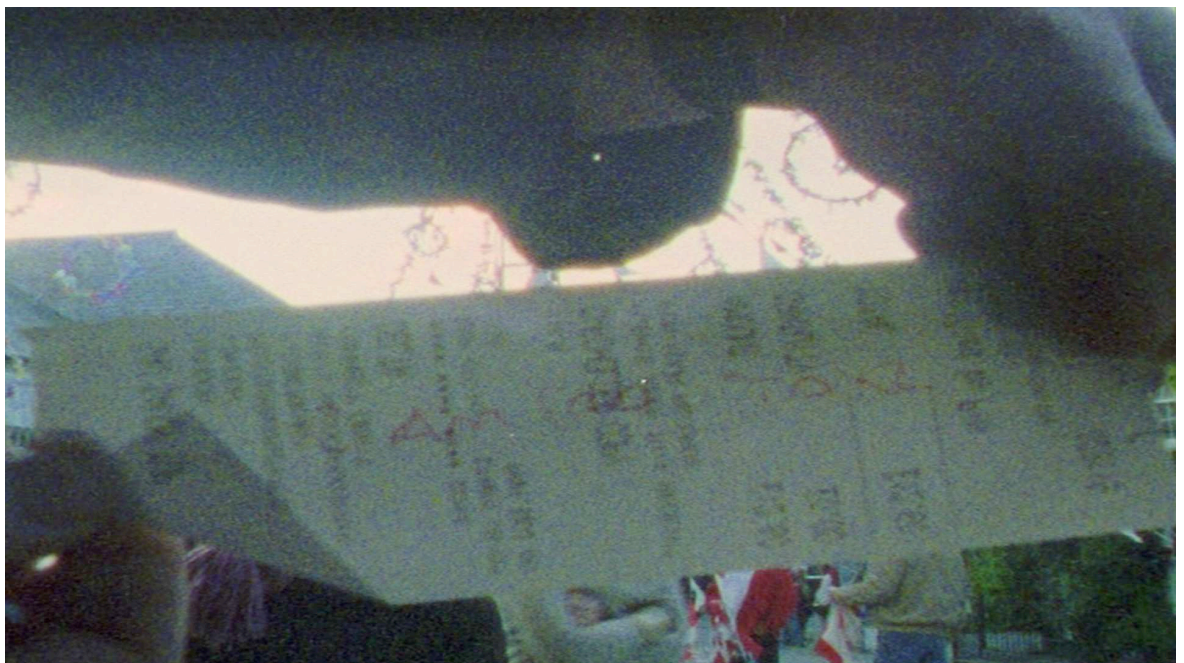
Given the nature of the rituals, the research was as much about limits to my experiences and non-participation as it was shared bodily experiences, and to re-iterate, it was precisely these distinctions and tensions *between* myself and others, and the nature of certain encounters, that I considered to be of empirical value. Tensions that exist with 'outsiders' in Padstow, were part of the climate in which I conducted my research, as I have already discussed. Locals have a non-inclusive attitude generally towards Mayday, and it is only men from certain families who may go under the 'Oss. Access to these ritual experiences was thus restricted, reflecting certain hierarchies within the community, as well as towards outsiders. A similar process seems to be at work here when comparing ritual in Padstow to the use of ritual masks in Africa as understood by art critic Mary Nooter. She argues it is not so much the experiences that are important, but their ability to define the social hierarchy and delineate boundaries through certain forms of secret knowledge (1993). It was therefore impossible for me to fully participate in the rituals. Like filmmaking, they comprise performances of power in themselves.

While in Haxey, the general attitude towards my presence was more open, there were similar limits to my partaking in the all male-rituals. While non-locals are invited to take part in the sway, it is only men who may participate. Occasionally women do fight their way in, but most men consider it to be inappropriate and try to drag them out. Additionally, it is only certain men at the centre of the tradition who guard the hood itself in the centre of the sway each year and influence where it goes. In the case of Haxey, it is through the viewpoint of a hidden camera used in the sway by a local man, rather than my own, that the audience witnesses the action in my film.

Limits to my experiences, due to my status as female and non-local, were also combined with the considerable hazards of drawing close to the action. In Haxey, the sway lurches unpredictably in one direction and then another, and in Padstow there was a persistent danger of being hit by the heavy 'Oss itself as it spins around. That locals can sometimes be aggressive towards tourists or filmmakers who draw in too close to the action in Padstow is reinforced by the well-known story of the BBC cameraman in the 1960s. He was punched in the face, and his camera was thrown in the quay. The incident in which I was dragged under the 'Oss myself and assaulted, referred to in the film (14:50), speaks of present day tensions. While unpleasant at

the time, it was a powerful, unmediated, bodily experience of the ritual and an expression of the tensions felt towards perceived outsiders.

Rather than attempt to make my own presence invisible in the final film, moments that bore witness to my own and my camera's encounters with others were actively sought out or described through the narrative. Shots such as a defiant hand blocking my view in Padstow, the couple standing in front of my camera as the maypole went up (see film, 24:45), being trapped under the 'Oss, or having to run backwards in Haxey as the sway lunched towards me, all reflect something of the inter-connections between my experiences, my camera's and subjects. While many of my encounters do not appear in the final film, this was nonetheless the attitude I adopted.



Film still, *Folk in Her Machine* (2013).

That filming is at times an uncomfortable process forms part of the research, filtering into the construction of meaning. There is an interesting parallel here with the ritual experiences themselves, which for participants can be painful and extreme.

Anthropologist Michael Houseman writes about the painful ritual encounters with home during the beating of the bounds ceremonies in the past as serving a purpose: those experiences were carved deeply in the memory and linked self to place (1998). The extreme experiences between people and places in Padstow and Haxey could be interpreted in similar ways. But the discomfort and pain inflicted on me when I

consider my experiences in Padstow served an opposite purpose. It ensured that I remembered these moments through their extremity, and was conversely reminded I did not belong there. They also remind the viewer of the ethical dilemmas and ambiguities at work in documentary filmmaking. Film historian Michael Chanan writes, "Sometimes a space is ambiguous, like the box in a theatre which is reserved for the exclusive use of a particular party of people who nonetheless remain in public view. Should we perhaps see the effect of the incursion of the documentary camera as analogous, turning a private place into a space that the public can see into, albeit in a controlled and partial way?" (2007: 226). Likewise, Amanda Coffey states in relation to ethnography, "fieldwork and observation often makes public the private body. We watch and note the body. The boundary between the private body and the public body is a fieldwork dilemma and an ethnical dilemma." (1999:74). My investigations seemed to exist very much at the boundaries of public and private space, revealing certain ambiguities and moments of resistance. And yet at certain moments as this thesis argues, bodily experiences are shared and boundaries are momentarily eroded. Also, through locals performing their own roles for the camera, such as in interviews, some kind of alliance is also formed, as Chanan recognised (2007:216). He asserts that the relationship between the filmmaker and subjects is something akin to psychotherapy, in which "the process of transference and counter-transference, therapeutic alliance, resistance and so forth" come into play (Berman, 2003, in Chanan, 2007:216). Chanan summarising this exchange, in which, "the film-maker's need of the subject invokes a complementary need in the subject for the film-maker." (216). I had the definite sense at times during my research that taking an interest in the rituals and allowing people to express their feelings towards them had some kind of therapeutic effect. One Boggin joked with me after an interview that he felt like he'd just had 'Hood therapy'. But this relationship is, of course, always an uneven one, the ultimate power once more lying with the filmmaker.

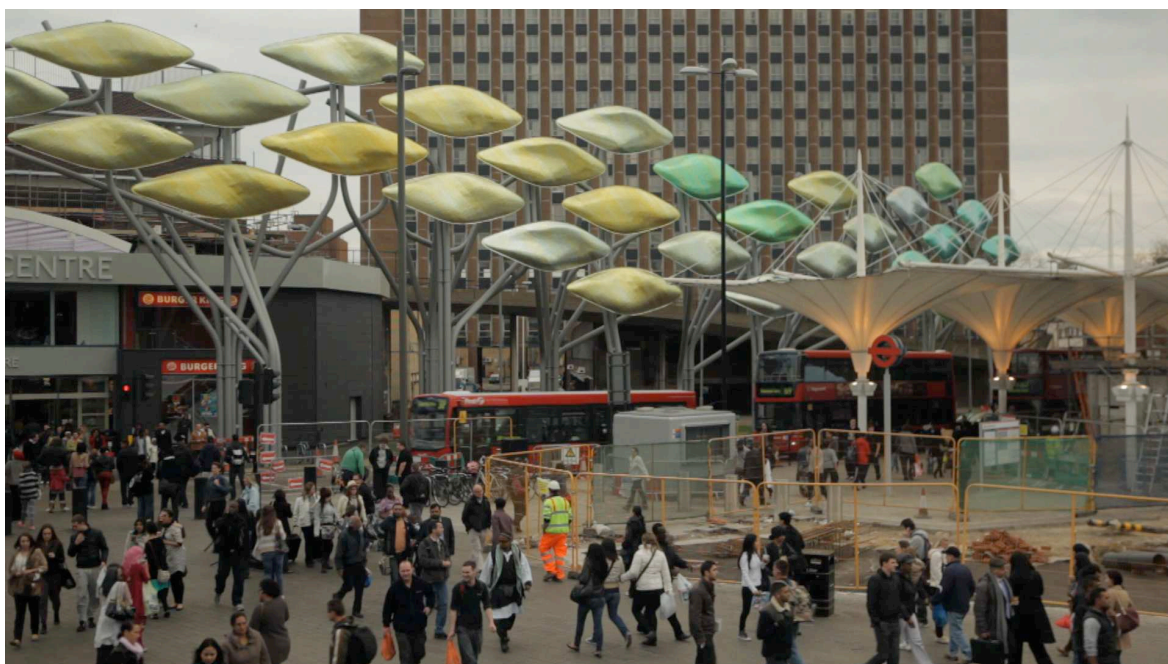
While much of the research focuses around social and embodied encounters with others, absence and imagination became means to explore non-ritual space too. Beyond the ritual days themselves, I wandered alone over the fields in Haxey and through the streets of Padstow, imagining the lives, embodied memories and experiences of others. The resultant footage and material speaks of boundaries,

partialities, of imagined and constructed 'truths'. It reminds the viewer of limits to knowledge, and that "the ethnographic field has always been as much characterized by absences as by presences." (Amit, 2000: 12). But it also intentionally opens up new embodied and discursive possibilities in doing so.

While my study was focused in Haxey and Padstow, the research also represents broader encounters between myself and the world beyond these two sites during the filmmaking period, and not only with people but also, as described, through imaginative engagements with places and landscapes. Anthropologist Vered Amit states that no 'field' exists independent of other places or independent of the researcher themselves. It is the self that links them together (2000:9). The research thus also became part of my everyday life and my travels in-between places. Carrying my camera through the city and on my travels became a means of imagining the lives of those who return back to the traditions from elsewhere, and a means to reflect on my own performed place in the world. Anthropologist Barbara Bender writes, "People's sense of place and landscape thus extends out from the locale and from the present encounter and is contingent on a larger temporal and spatial field of relationships. The explanation moves backwards and forwards between the detail of everyday existence and these larger forces." She adds that even for those who have lived in the same place for generations and have not travelled elsewhere, there are always other places, whether known personally or through the recollections of others and imagination (2001:84). To create a film that includes local and wider forces and experiences in its scope was thus to explore these complex interconnections. It is also to reflect critically, once again, on the power relations present through the filmmaking process. For my research I travelled freely between places, my presence and mobility thus being a position of power. Some who participate in the rituals live away and travel back, while others rarely leave their home<sup>50</sup>, but all were subjected to my subjective interpretations. While the film acknowledges certain experiential commonalities and shared histories, it is also an exploration of, to once more quote Pratt's idea of 'contact zones', the "intersecting trajectories" and points of exchange between myself and others, as geographically and historically separated (1992:6-7).

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<sup>50</sup> I was told by various people in Padstow that there are many local residents who have never left Cornwall.



Film still, *Folk in Her Machine* (2013).

Finally, in terms of the practicalities of shooting, the cameras I used for filming were a Canon XM2 (of which very little remains in the final film owing to lower quality), Canon 5D, Canon 7D for slow motion, Canon C300, and 16mm largely shot on a Bolex camera. I encountered various technical problems in filming the rituals. One year none of my 16mm footage came out owing to a problem with the lens, and another year issues arose with my Canon XM2 camera, and a whole key digital videotape did not come out. Because of the issues I had encountered and the pressure of the events taking place on one day a year, in 2011 in Haxey and 2011-12 in Padstow I took an additional camera person with me for one day as a back-up to shoot additional material<sup>51</sup>. Despite the film being presented from the perspective of a female narrator, I justify my second cameras being male-operated in these cases by reiterating the role of performance and fiction in this film, and in my own directing of their shots. Further, the vast majority of the images in the final film were in fact shot by myself. The more experimental, haptic techniques were primarily explored through my own camerawork and experiences, with my assistants focusing more on general establishing shots of the action to ensure coverage. Also, as I have already

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<sup>51</sup> In 2011 Tom Lock came with me to Padstow with an additional 16mm camera, and Kevin Brown came with me to Haxey in 2011 with a 5D camera and Padstow in 2012 with a C300 camera.

explained, my tactile strategies are not exclusively feminist in scope. They draw attention to the politics of image-making and place-making in various ways, acknowledge the multiplicity and over-lapping nature of the self and our social selves.

## **Interviews**

For the formal interviews I carried out, there were certain issues with access in Padstow as with the filming. In Haxey, I became acquainted with the Boggins and many other participants in the tradition very quickly. In Padstow, however, it took years of patience and proceeding with great caution until some of the key members of the 'Old 'Oss party agreed to talk to me. This was not entirely problematic, as in both locations I was also interested in gaining insights from those less closely involved too, such as those who came back from elsewhere to take part, those who were critical of the traditions, and women, who generally play more marginal roles.

In total I carried out eighteen in-depth recorded interviews of between sixty and one hundred and twenty minutes in Padstow, and fifteen in and around Haxey. These were supplemented also by the many more informal interviews and conversations I had during my time there. I also carried out one interview in Amsterdam, one in London, and one in Devon with three individuals who travel back to Padstow each year for Mayday. Having met and talked to these people already at the traditions, I wanted to speak to them away from the traditions and at other times of year to get a sense of their lives beyond the rituals, and what drew them back<sup>52</sup>.

The interviews themselves were designed to be as open-ended as possible. Rather than try and guide the subjects too strongly or bring forward pre-determined agendas I had basic questions in mind regarding ritual experience, the broader socio-economic context and their inter-relations. But I was also interested in subjects themselves steering the interviews onto the subjects that they felt were most

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<sup>52</sup> A full list of the interviews is provided in the appendix. While people travel back each year to take part in Haxey Hood, the scale and distances people travel from is greater in Padstow.



important to them<sup>53</sup>. Wendy Hollway and Tony Jeffson advocate open questions to elicit narratives and to allow for 'free association', a psychoanalytic method that allows the 'patient' to say whatever comes to mind and in doing so brings out unconscious emotional responses rather than entirely rational ones (2000). This approach was of interest especially in exploring the uncanny natures of the ritual experiences themselves, and the deeper resonances they contain for locals.

These techniques needed balancing with the practical requirements of recording voices for the film, and to elicit particular information<sup>54</sup>. Although I wanted the interviews to be fairly informal, I did at times steer the interviews onto the central themes underpinning my work. I was also aware that what people said needed to be clear and useable for the film, meaning occasionally I had to re-ask a question or get them to repeat what they said in a full sentence. The interviews were recorded using an M-Audio Microtrack recorder and directional microphone, usually placed on a table in front of the subject. Subjects were always aware that their voices were being recorded for potential use in the film, inevitably influencing what people said and the way it was articulated. In this way, the interviews served two purposes. They were a means to understand the nature and texture of place and ritual experience through local's own words, and at the same time the intention was always to use some of them in the film.

Just as the whole process of filmmaking is seen as a performative encounter, so too the outcome of the interviews is also perceived in this way. James Holstein and Jaber Gubrium refer to interviews as an 'interpersonal drama' in which meaning unfolds through the interactions between interviewer and interviewee. Again, fixed meanings are displaced in favour of subjective encounters, with the interview seen as evolving as a kind of 'developing plot' (14).

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<sup>53</sup> See Hollway and Jeffson's 'Doing qualitative research differently: Free Association, Narrative, and the Interview method' (2000), and Holstein and Gubrium's 'The Active Interview' (1995).

<sup>54</sup> My approach to interviewing was not entirely at odds with my use of film. Film too contains the ability to provoke certain forms of expression. Edgar Morin, writing about Rouch's *Chronicle of a Summer*, describes the 'truth' being searched for within cinema-verite as akin to 'psychoanalytic truth', owing to the camera's ability to bring to the surface hidden or suppressed elements of subjects' personalities (2003, cited in Chanan, 2007: 215).



I later arranged all interviews through transcribing and coding them, and then by drawing out key themes that recurred or seemed significant. I was then able to follow up any further questions I had through informal conversations with subjects on subsequent visits and through other interviews. I also developed closer relationships with key informants in both places over time, who provided me with in-depth information about local life and the rituals. Additionally, I became friends with three men of my age, two of whom currently live in Amsterdam and one in London, who travel back to Padstow each year to take part. I came to socialise with them over the years in Padstow, Amsterdam and London. What was interesting about their perspectives was their feeling drawn to go back each year, despite living urban lives that had much in common with my own, and their own sense of the uncanny nature of the rituals that compelled them return each year without their fully understanding why.

### **Embodied filming techniques**

The approach to filming in the field was one strongly influenced by the concepts of haptic and embodied filmmaking laid out in Chapter 1. This was both as a means to draw close to others' experiences, to evoke an embodied and active response in an audience, but also as an intentional political strategy in which a tactile, sensual approach offers alternative forms of representation that run counter to dominant ones. The audience is denied any simplistic depiction of reality through certain distortions, and by drawing attention to the material presence of the film. Through a performative approach to the filming, the inter-subjective and fictional natures of documentary representation are brought to the fore.

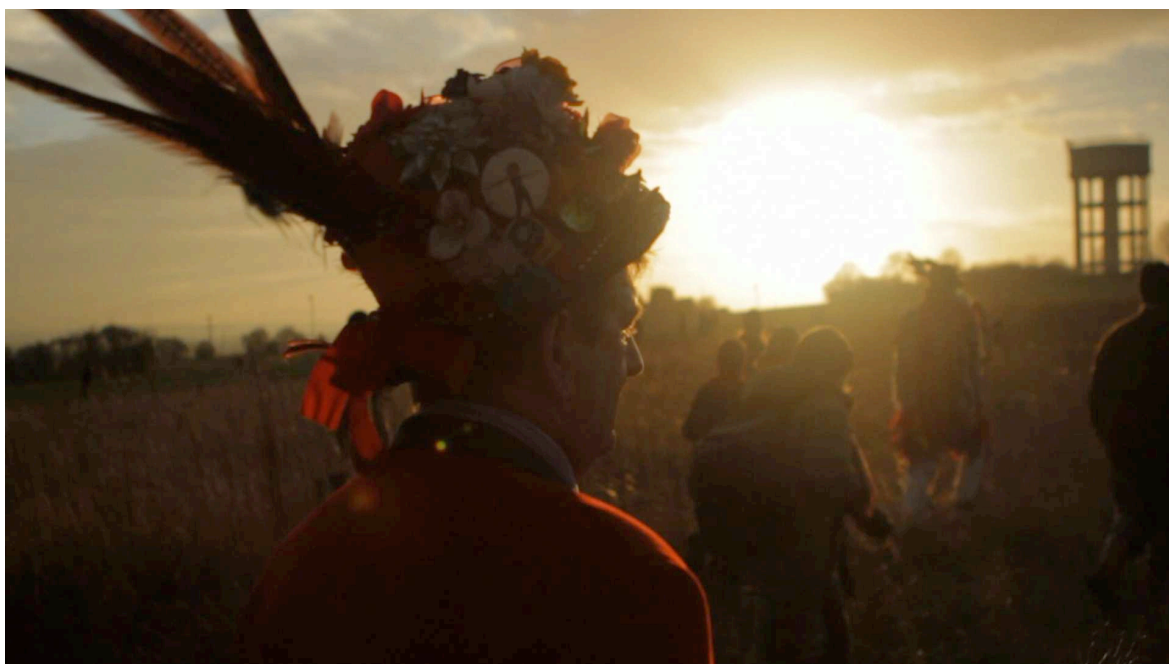
In an attempt to convey multi-sensory experiences and the textures of place and ritual, the overall aim of the film was to draw near, closely scrutinise, and move through space and place with my camera. In this way the primacy of my own and the film's performative bodies in knowing and understanding the world were explored.

Movement has already been discussed as one of my key embodied 'strategies' in Chapter 1 of this thesis. It is conceived as a means through which bodies, including film's body, by moving through space, actively engage with, inter-act, perform and

produce meaning in a world in continual formation. I will thus commence this section with a consideration of the intentional use of camera movement in my research. This takes on various forms, such as filming my own footsteps, following and mirroring subjects during the rituals, and moving through space with my camera by panning out of train and car windows.

At the beginning of the film, we see a shot of my feet as I walk through the streets of London, framed from the perspective of the narrator as she explores the city and asks what it means to belong there (see film, 00:21-01:20). The technique of filming myself in this way is repeated at various points in the film. In Padstow, she refers to a local fisherman who tells her he feels alienated in the town today when he walks around the centre. The camera pans through the tourist-filled streets as I walk through the harbour (see film, 08:34). Here, the man being referred to remains absent, and I instead perform my own movements through space as a means of imagining. But my own identity is never fully disclosed either.

In the ritual section, my body and my camera at times follow people as they participate. In Haxey, for example, I walk behind and alongside the Lord of the Hood as he strides up onto the field bathed in beautiful wintry light to start the game for another year (see film, 12:26). Through tracing his footsteps, the audience form an empathetic relationship with subjects. The gaps between my own and my camera's experiences, and those of the man portrayed are nonetheless evident. The camera follows behind him rather than presents his own perspective, and over-identification with subjects is thus denied. The images are never held for long, instead substituted for others, shot over a period of different years and in different weathers to form a collage. This layering denies any sense of the continuous flow of time. In this way I explore themes of presence and absence, the real and the imagined, and the interplay between subject experiences and my own reflexive ones. Meaning is located between the bodies of subjects, film, filmmaker and audience.



Film still, *Folk in Her Machine* (2013).

These means of both drawing close to lived experience and highlighting the performative role of the filmmaker and film are also addressed through tracking shots at various points in the film from cars and trains. In the introduction, the narrator decides to go on a trip to visit some folk customs. We see images shot from a car moving along a motorway. This technique recurs throughout the film. In the 'Away' section, for example (see film, 17:48-22:05), different shots taken from cars and trains are intercut into the sequence, both in England and abroad, as a means to imagine the journeys of those who travel back each year to the folk traditions, some from far afield. Again here I play between real and the fictional meanings. The audience becomes aware that what they are seeing on the screen is not the journeys of the men who talk about their reasons for returning, but the filmmaker's own footage shot on her various travels over the years. These images become a way of imagining, through her own embodied experiences, what returning to these rituals might mean for those who live away. This is then further complicated through the voiceover. When the narrator goes to Paris, she describes an encounter with a man she had met when she was in Padstow who lived there, but then she asks, "or was it Geneva he said..?" (see film, 19:59). We witness shots of Paris, but some doubt is generated as to the authenticity of what is being presented onscreen.

The tracking shots also remind the audience of the complex inter-connections between places that characterise contemporary life. They suggest, again, that all places are known in the context of others we have been to, and that much of place and space is perceived and known while on the move. The filmmaker's own bodily experiences and those that emerge for the audience are closely inter-linked but distinct too. Film's body transforms and adds its own subjective layers of meaning, and the viewer then encounters the work through the filter of their own complex web of memories and associations.

Finally, camera movements are also used in various ways during the rituals themselves as a means of drawing close, mirroring and exploring the sensual qualities of the events. Part of this approach involved following ritual participants as they moved through space at these moments as previously mentioned. But movement was also a means to copy, invent and explore other gestures and movements within the folk performances. In Padstow, the camera moves from side to side in time to the beat of the drum, just as locals dance and play instruments to the tune of the May song (see film, 30:35). The images suggest here a desire to participate and to merge with the experiences of others. MacDougall recognised this desire by the filmmaker to partake, described as "the mimetic longings of the filmmaker to show what they see" (2006: 26). For Marks there is an erotic quality to filmmaking (and viewing) too. It is full of desire and longing to reach out and touch, to be absorbed (334). But the camera moves along its own course. It is directed by my own hands and intentions, yet offers a technological vision of the rituals at these times distinct from my own and those of subjects too.

That film has its own way of embodying and *re-presenting* lived experience is evident too in the amateur footage from the sway in Haxey. The audience sees the action from the viewpoint of one man's hand from which he secretly records. The camera shakes, steams up, turns on one side and distorts through its wide-angle perspective. Again, the audience witnesses something resembling, but distinct from, the camera operator's own perspective.



Film still, *Folk in Her Machine* (2013).

That I myself could not enter into the sway speaks here too of limits to my own and my camera's experiences. Camera movements and mirroring techniques are here seen as key methods to bring the viewer closer both physically and emotionally to the experiences being conveyed, and evoke new embodied readings.

It should be noted here that while the use of certain camera movements are recurrent themes in the film, these techniques are interspersed with more static shots and other tactile approaches. I would argue that all of my shots make use of an embodied camera perspective in some way. They all bear witness to my own presence 'in the field', back home and on journeys, and the close inter-relationships between my own, and film's bodily experiences. Certain static shots are themselves too a means of drawing close and scrutinising place and space. In Haxey, for example, close-up details and textures of the landscape where the game is played are presented in the 'Home II Haxey' section (16:04). Through tactile encounters outside of the ritual days, broader senses of place are also conveyed. These images are also a means through which to imagine the layers of memory embedded in the landscape, that are re-awakened and re-performed each year through ritual experience, and the inter-connections between ritual and non-ritual experience. These meanings are evoked through voices of locals talking about the rituals, and sounds of the rituals layered over my visuals of the empty 'Hood field'. In Padstow, to provide another example, I

spent time in the community allotment with old fishermen. I again convey intimate details of that space such as a salvaged bath in a stream, a dead swan abandoned on a compost heap and the textures of an old garden shed. Here I also create an intimate sense of place that the audience might be able also to imagine through their own sensory experiences.

Standing back and looking at the world through a fixed camera frame is also to acknowledge certain boundaries to experience. Cosgrove's writings on place and belonging are influential too in this approach. He writes, "For the insider, there is no clear separation of self from scene, subject from object". The outsider, on the other hand, is like a tourist. In trying to prise apart and analyse "we risk denying the integrity of the insider's experience"(1985: 19). The camera looks on, as well as participating in, and being dynamically engaged with, place and ritual. In this way I acknowledge my position as a perceived outsider, and never pretend to fully understand. I see all these boundaries and 'outsider' labels as imagined and arbitrary in reality, but my experiences nonetheless differ from those of others.

As this research is particularly interested in the nature and texture of ritual experiences and their representation, I want to discuss in more detail the use of embodied and tactile filming strategies in relation to the ritual section of the film. This thesis explores these ritual experiences as generating certain senses of place and belonging for participants. As well as considering broader socio-economic contexts in the film, this is carried out through an imaginative investigation into the nature of these ritual experiences themselves, in an attempt to understand what these experiences might be, and *how* they might serve to connect people and place. This was achieved through conveying an *intensification* of experience during the ritual film sequences themselves for an audience.

Just as ritual experience on that day represents moments clearly marked from daily life, the intention was thus to create a distinctive filmic space during the ritual section of the film that was very different from the representations of Haxey, Padstow and London outside of these ritual days.

To convey to an audience certain qualities of the rituals, their uncanny nature, and the cohesive or therapeutic power they contain for locals I believe requires

imagination and poetry, rather than realist representation. To do this, I bring the “wild” qualities of lived experience (following Merleau-Ponty), and in turn film, to the fore, heightened and distorted through both my filming, and later through techniques such as re-filming. The more abstract qualities of the ritual sequences speak of cinematic ‘excess’, of the elements of film that are irreducible to language<sup>55</sup>. This excess provides interesting parallels with the nature of ritual experience, which Bloch recognised amounts to more than the sum of its parts, containing a coercive power he termed a “performative” or “illocutionary” force as discussed in Chapter 1 (Bloch, 1989:31). These experiences briefly immerse the audience in a different experiential space, but through the earlier presentation of broader social contexts, a dialogical relationship is set up between these moments and the wider politics of place. The heavily constructed and highly subjective sequences, surface texture of the image, and slow motion footage, also serve as a continual reminder that the viewer is witnessing a transformed version of the rituals.

Shooting on 16mm film and using a slow motion camera at the rituals themselves were then two of the strategies used to achieve this transformed ritual space. In terms of 16mm, whereas there is an immediacy and realism, or even perhaps hyperrealism, to high quality digital imagery today, the materiality of film contains different qualities. When viewed by an audience, it sensually makes its presence known through surface texture and grain. I then accentuated and drew attention to this through hand-processing footage myself. Arguably 16mm imagery allows a greater imaginative space beyond realist representation for the viewer. This leaves potential for more filmic or mythical readings of the documentary image, seen as particularly relevant when thinking about certain qualities of ritual experience as somewhat unknowable and abstract<sup>56</sup> At the same time, and almost in contradiction

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<sup>55</sup> I rely here on film theorist Kristin Thompson’s definition of the term. Film is created through certain structures that combine to form a narrative, and cinematic excess describes elements of the work “which are not contained by its unifying forces” (1999: 513). They are counter-narrative, and imply a certain tension in the work. Yet Thompson argues these elements can also illuminate the structures of the narrative, and deem it arbitrary.

<sup>56</sup> In her article ‘Video, Haptics and Erotics’, Marks argues that it is through the digital grain of the video image that a tactile relationship between viewer and film is created (1998). I chose instead to explore this through 16mm film, which for me conveys this relationship through a direct phenomenological link to lived experience.

to this argument, 16mm film seemed the most appropriate way to draw closer to the rituals phenomenologically. The film's physical presence in the camera being exposed to light at those moments in time during the rituals mean something of the real lived essence of place at that time was captured in the film (although then later transferred to digital).



Film still, *Folk in Her Machine*, (2013).

The use of slow motion footage at the rituals likewise is seen as a means to draw close, and allow for bodily engagement with the images through, in this case, duration and intense scrutiny. At the same time, it also allows for gaps to be opened up between real life experience and filmic representation. This approach partly pays homage to Maya Deren's entrancing slow motion footage in Haiti for *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (1953). Through her powerful imagery, the viewer's experience is transformed and distinct from those performing the trances. Likewise in this film, the use of slow motion and 16mm is intended too to be transformative for the viewer.

For feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey, the slowing down and repetition of images, "allows the spectator to hold on to, to possess", the image, and in this way the



spectator is also enabled a “heightened relation to the human body” (2005: 161) <sup>57</sup>. Filming in slow motion also importantly involves the camera physically perceiving the world at a different speed to the filmmaker through a faster shutter speed, thereby also conceptually drawing attention to the gaps that exist between ‘natural’ and filmic perception. Something of the essence of lived experiences is transposed to the film, yet these intermittent shots fragment and distort, altering the flow of time from the outset. I return to discuss the use of slow motion further later in my consideration of the editing process.

Other camera techniques I used are also arguably both tactile and transformative in nature. The camera draws closer to people on these ritual days, zooming in on limbs and movement, facial expressions and gestures, framing reality to draw attention to and closely investigate the rituals and the ways they are experienced by others. MacDougall describes these kinds of intimate perspectives and the distinctive framing of the world made possible through film as tactile ones too. A face depicted at close range is one the audience can almost reach out and touch, for example, and these experiences differ from real life ones (2006:21-22)<sup>58</sup>. I also play between surface and depth, between ‘being’ and ‘meaning’ in the rituals, or between optic and haptic approaches, to refer to Barker’s ideas once more. So while certain shots convey clearly what is happening, others verge on abstraction, particularly in my use of close-ups, such as shots of the ‘Oss twirling around, and through re-filming techniques that will be discussed in the next section. This interplay between the known and the unknown denies mastery over the subject, instead searching for other performative and dialogical meanings.

As a final point, these approaches to ritual are not just a means to consider their experiential qualities for subjects, but also as an exploration of the wider appeal of ritual in contemporary life. The presentation of my own experiences via third person

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<sup>57</sup> Mulvey discusses this in the different context of the advent of digital viewing, in the viewer’s ability to re-watch and fragment linear narrative through re-playing sections of the film.

<sup>58</sup> He is influenced here by Benjamin’s concept of the camera as perceptual unconscious in which new ways of seeing became possible through the advent of the camera. Taussig also writes about this (1994).

narration will be discussed at a later point, but I want to suggest here that the process of filming itself is also one capable of inducing altered states for the filmmaker. The drawing close to the action through filming involves some dissolution of boundaries between filmmaker, film and subjects, or at times even perhaps a mystical “synchrony” between filmmaker and the world (MacDougall, 2006:27). Again I reference here Jean Rouch’s notion of cine-trance. Through my filming the rituals with the intent of portraying the intensity of these moments, I myself underwent an intensification of experience at these times.

Here I repeat once more, however, that film too transforms through its own independent body. Through the film, the audience in turn is offered distinctive experiences of the rituals. These filmic experiences themselves contain distinctive elements that are “uncontrolled and uncontrollable” (MacDougall, 2006:3), similar to the irreducible nature of ritual experience itself. Film may in this way be seen as capable of evoking altered states in an audience that contains affinities to altered ritual states themselves.

### **Sound recordings**

Conceptually, the thesis argues that it is through film’s ability to convey lived multi-sensory experience that allows for embodied forms of knowing in an audience. Rather than separating the senses and discussing them in isolation, embodied experience is primarily seen as working through all the senses simultaneously, and in the case of film, at once through audio, visual and tactile means. Artist Bill Viola, for example, writes, “we usually think of the camera as an ‘eye’ and the microphone as an ‘ear’, but all the senses exist simultaneously in our bodies, interwoven into one system that includes sensory data, neural processing, memory, imagination, and all the mental events of the moment. This adds up to create the larger phenomenon we call experience.” (1995:151-2)

While there are an increasing number of studies on the role of synaesthesia, the exact role of different perceptual channels and the way they inter-connect through cinematic experience is not clear. In positioning sound within a phenomenological framework, some have nonetheless written about the ear as “actually and

metaphorically stabilising the spectator's body (and self perception as a perceiving subject) in space" (Elsaesser and Hagener 2010:130). The ear might in this way be seen to representing the inner self, compared to skin and tactility that suggests surface contacts, and is therefore a central element of "perception, knowledge and experience". It is an organ through which, "the spectator is no longer a passive recipient of images at the pointed end of an optical pyramid, but rather a bodily being enmeshed acoustically, spatially and affectively in the filmic texture" (131-2). Sound seen in this way clearly plays an integral role in multi-sensory experience of place and space. In anthropology, there are others too who have studied the role of sound in the formation and expression of culture. Steven Feld, for example, focuses on the poetics of Apache stories and songs of the Kaluli people of Bosavi, Western Papua New Guinea. He argues that these voices embody memories and sensually animate local landscapes and soundscapes (Feld, 1996). While an in-depth consideration of the independent role of sound in conveying certain senses of place is beyond the scope of this research, here the use of sound is primarily discussed in relation to the recordings made in the 'field', and then later with reference to the sound compositions and sound design.

Although over the years I did various recordings myself, to ensure a high quality audio outcome for the film, I took a sound recordist to Haxey in 2011 for three days and to Padstow in 2012 for five days for the final film. I directed their recordings both around the locales and in key spaces to correspond with visual themes and on the ritual days<sup>59</sup>.

With regard to how I approached sound recordings in my two research sites at non-ritual times, by this time I was conscious already of certain themes that I wanted to address in the film. In Haxey, for example, a theme that emerges is that of the isolation, boredom and the lack of distinctive identity in this commuter village. We therefore made recordings at various locations in the village and on the field itself in order to convey some of the sensory qualities of that place beyond the ritual days. The recordings were framed to some extent by ideas developed through prior

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<sup>59</sup> Duncan Whitley came to Haxey, and Andrej Bako and his assistant came to Padstow. Andrej then went on to design the sound for the film.

fieldwork, but were also the product of incidental encounters with certain places and spaces at particular moments in time.

Sound is integral to our overall experience of place, and each place has its own unique sounds and noises by which it is experienced and can be identified. The audio qualities of local environments form part of people's understandings of the world, whether conscious or subconscious. R. Murray Schafer, founder of the Acoustic Ecology movement in the 1960s, was an advocate of heightening awareness of the sounds and noises that surround us, and how they impact on our lives. He believed that each environment contains unique sonic qualities that describe and form part of a culture in a given place. He also used the term 'soundmark', derived from landmark, to refer to sounds that characterise and are unique to certain places. (1994:10) In Padstow and Haxey, the sounds of the May song and the sway on these seasonal days could themselves be seen as seasonal soundmarks for they are unique to those particular places on the ritual days. Much of Schafer's writing now seems outdated, particularly his idealistic beliefs in the virtues of 'natural' sounds as opposed to the contaminating sounds of modern life. I do not choose to attach these kind of simplistic values to the sounds I recorded in this research, but I do recognise the unique sonic qualities different places contain that form part of how they are sensed, known and imagined.

In more subtle ways, senses of place are conveyed to an audience through the sounds and textures of different places and space. By recording sounds in an allotment in Padstow, such as stream water trickling through a salvaged bath, pigeons cooing and birds singing, a certain sense of 'being there' and the unique qualities of that particular place at those moments in time are conveyed to the audience.

My approach to field recordings, while based on the sonic qualities of place and space, and maintaining respect for the empirical, is not however, an entirely realist one. The resultant materials are instead seen as the product of performed and subjective encounters between myself, (and the sound recordist) and the world at certain moments in time. These recordings contain within them something of "wild" life experience, just as those made in London and on journeys speak of phenomenological

connections with the world too. But the resultant sounds are products of intervention, and the audio device, like the camera, both presents and *re*-presents too.

The rituals themselves were approached in the same spirit. Intimate recordings close to the action speak of the bodily encounters between the sound recordist, mechanical device and the action at those times. Recordings were made moving through space, following subjects participating in the rituals, as well as recording from fixed locations, in the same conceptual vein as the visuals.

Through documenting quieter sounds and bringing them to the foreground I was also interested in conveying some of the hidden or subliminal qualities of the places and events. These, like the use of camera, comprise tactile encounters between recordist, device and the world. For example, in Padstow, we recorded sounds of boat engines and sail ropes tapping against masts and creaking against the jetty, picking up vibrations with contact microphones, and put miniature microphones into drainage channels to record space of pipes with water running through them.

The integration of these audio field recordings into my final film will be discussed when exploring the interpretation of my field materials. The relationship between field recordings and the compositional elements of the film will also be discussed at that stage.

This first part of my methods section considered time 'in the field' and the body as the nexus through which the experiences of self, camera and subject collide and intersect. It foregrounded the phenomenological inter-connections between people and place in the collection of the materials and the performative encounters involved in this process. The next section describes the process of shaping the materials gathered during the research period into the film. It deals with the process of interpretation, in which I sought ways to further fragment, question, and comment on these embodied experiences, images and sounds, influenced by the concept of experimental ethnography and particularly through auto-ethnography.

### **Part 3: Interpretation**

#### **Auto-ethnography and voice**

This sub-section builds upon my definition of auto-ethnography developed in Chapter 1 to consider the use of voiceover in my film. While I have already argued that every stage of filmmaking is auto-ethnographic through the subjective presence of the filmmaker and choices made during the research, I want to apply the term here primarily to consider the ways I inscribed my performed 'self' into the film through the narrative. To re-iterate, a focusing on personal experience is used in this research both as a means of reflecting on my embodied experiences, but also as a staging of subjectivity and a de-centring strategy, to expose the ambiguities and fictitious 'truths' of documentary filmmaking.

The writing of the narrative for my film was a process that developed over time and alongside the idea of breaking the film down into chapters. Once I had a substantial body of material to work with, certain themes and sub-sections seemed to emerge; the rituals themselves, the places and landscapes where they took place, the run-up to the events, the people who travelled back, my own life in London. It seemed appropriate for me to start the film back home, where the journey began, and end it there too, and then to structure the piece as a narrative with myself looking back over the materials making sense of them all. The materials included many diary notes, as well as audio-visual materials. When I first wrote the script it was thus theoretical reading, my experiences, and these notes that shaped my ideas. But the script also shifted over time through the editing process, and the voice in the final film always refers to the image in some way. The shaping of the narrative then also became a way of layering meaning over time. Watching the images again and again allowed for new embodied, tactile and imaginative relationships with them distinct from those 'in the field'.

Despite the film primarily addressing issues of space and place, it also then importantly became about my relationship to time. This becomes evident in the use of voiceover as a form of looking back over the materials I collected in the field, which I refer to as my archive, and film's relationship to time more generally. Experiences of the past become present and future through translation and imagination in the film.

For Russell, “To recall the past by way of memory traces is to render it ‘another culture’ in an ever receding palimpsest of overlapping cultures, of which past, present and future are merely points of perspective” (1999:313). Reflecting back over time thus exposes film as a kind of mirage, in which claims to authenticity are eschewed<sup>60</sup>. For film theorist Jay Cantor, “film is memory, for films, like memories, give us a world that is ours, yet that we are barred from entering”. For him, we enter imaginatively into history through filmmaking precisely because there is death in all images (1995: 24). This imaginative reaching out to the image by the audience again involves a bodily engagement, albeit one that involves both empathy and a realisation that film is an illusory medium.

The use of the third person voiceover became a means to complicate and perform my experiences. It leaves space for ambiguities, and offsets claims to an authentic voice or mastery over the image. While the narrative draws on my own autobiographical experiences over the years, I nonetheless intend the film also to be a wider commentary on our social selves in the current climate in relation to place and belonging. The style of the voiceover is also important. It is presented as a stream of tentative, poetic reflections rather than one that claims complete authority over the image.

Feminist filmmaker and academic Trinh T.Minh Ha believes that a problematising of the subject in contemporary theory can be best carried out with poetical language. She writes; “In poetry the ‘I’ can *never* be said to simply personify an individual”. Many assume the ‘I’ to be the immediate, real and personal self, but she believes this is not accurate. “In poetical language there is no ‘I’ which just stands for *myself*. The ‘I’ is there; it has to be there, but it is there as the site where all other ‘I’s’ can enter and cut across one another.” It is this quality of poetical language that can “radically contribute to the questioning of the relationship of subjects to power, language and meaning in theory.” (Trinh, 1992:121-2). Likewise, the same could be said of the use of voices in this film. It suggests the multiplicity of the self, here as a staged entity, and an overlapping between the experiences of the narrator and those of subjects in the film.

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<sup>60</sup> I refer to the images I have collected over the years as my archive in the film.

Deren similarly advocates a poetic approach to experience. When discussing the role of voice in relation to image she believes words should not just describe the image, which should be complete in itself, but add a new dimension and depth relating to it. (Deren and Maas, 1963: 16). The voice in this film too, it is hoped, adds new meaning and depth through a poetic rather than authoritative style and content.

The narrative also resembles a form of diary in some ways. Past experiences I had at the traditions are recalled as I look back over the images and consider them anew, in a process similar to the one used by Jonas Mekas in *Reminiscences of A Journey to Lithuania* (1972<sup>61</sup>). Just as Mekas looks back over footage he shot many years before and imagines his former self, the narrator in my film sifts through her images and remembers time past, seeing certain internal changes that have come about through her journey. But memory is ambiguous and is also a form of fictionalisation. This perspective is a central theme of Sarah Turner's recent film *Perestroika* (2009), in which she travels through Russia to re-live her memories of a friend who died there many years before.

Equally there is an essayistic quality to the prose, with certain facts and anecdotes interjected with more personal experiences. Russell noted that the essay diary form is a useful way to comment on the world tentatively without claiming authority over it (1999:277), and that is the goal here.

For post-colonial film theorist Hamid Nacify, (2001: 282) "film is a performance of the identity of its maker", and my film is framed in this way. It is a staged exploration of my own interior life as well as the external world I encounter. It is also a meditation on the nature of filmmaking, its embodied sensual possibilities and limitations.

Russell sees the example of *Sans Soleil* (1983) as particularly apt in demonstrating the possibilities for experimental ethnography. It is, for her, "perhaps a radical attempt to disown images, to dislodge them from a pre-text in which the filmmaker is deeply implicated". The film deliberately dissipates a point of view through problematising the author's positioning (Marker, 2000:59), in what Russell terms a "fully post-

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<sup>61</sup> For other examples of personal, diary style filmmaking that all adopt distinctive approaches to this genre, see also Mekas and Guerín's *Correspondence: Jonas Mekas - JL Guerín*. (2011), George Kuchar's *We, the Normal* (1988), and Su Friedrich's *The Ties That Bind* (1984).



modern ethnography” (2009:310). All sense of ‘being there’ is ruptured in space and time by the correspondence which conveys the melancholy of time past, which drifts alongside the images, reviews them, and peels back layers of meaning and emptiness. This film thus locates cultural process outside of and between places (see also Rafferty, 1996). Whilst this film and Russell’s viewpoint is an influence, again here I express some caution in adhering fully to her version of experimental ethnography. The challenge in my own work was instead to remain grounded within real social circumstances and places, set within critical frameworks and strategies.

Some of the ways this film remains grounded in social realities is through the observations of the narrator being counter-posed with voices of local people. These voices are presented in short fragments and sentences, drawing attention to their partial nature, and appear in dialogue with the narrator’s voice. Despite inevitable power relations between filmmaker and filmed, local narratives nonetheless go some way to democratising readings of the film, so the place and the rituals are not just expressed from my own point of view. Also, just as the ambiguities surrounding the narrator’s identity in relation to my own raise questions regarding authenticity, so too inevitably questions are raised regarding the voices of locals and the performative ‘truths’ contained therein. These questions exist once more alongside the experiential qualities of the voices. Just as the texture of the film itself speaks of ‘being there’, so too the local voices full of emotion and depth in the film allow for embodied connections between subjects and audience.

The gender of the narrator is also of central significance. The narration is not meant to essentialise female identity, and I am wary of over-simplification, stereotypes or judgments. It is rather based on a performance of subjective and inter-subjective experiences, opening up space for alternative perspectives. Returning to the Patrick Keiller’s films, his use of narration is detached and academic, with dense prose accompanying images throughout the film. My own use of voice is intended to be less cerebral. It is instead more intimate and sensual in tone, the voice of a woman tentatively exploring her archive of images and looking for meaning within by closely scrutinising. Voice is simply one means through which a feminine approach to my material and research is presented. To re-iterate, tactile filming strategies were also influenced by Barker’s conceptions of embodied filming approaches as feminist

'strategies'. The whole embodied theoretical framing of the film is one that maintains that much of experience beyond language altogether. Again in contrast to the films of Keiller, at times the voice retreats entirely and the audience is invited to immerse themselves in the dreamlike images, in meanings beyond language. Some feminist thinkers see this as the great potential of embodied approaches, a point discussed and applied more in the next section when I describe methods such as re-filming and slow motion, used to draw out some of the abstract qualities of ritual experience. Overall, the relationship I create between voice and image in *Folk in Her Machine* is one built on terms very different to those of Patrick Keiller.

Finally, the creation of a female character based upon my own experiences and yet also removed from them opens up space for different readings and ambiguities too. She is a kind of ethnographer but her identity is also that of a traveller/wanderer/tourist in her repeated journeys to these places and her relationship to them. Within contemporary art, the persona of traveller or tourist has also often been adopted by the artist. But this approach can sometimes imply the superficial and voyeuristic perspective of an outsider looking in. The female narrator in my film is at once traveller, outsider, tourist and critic, yet she also simultaneously always attempts to draw close through shared embodied experiences that might also dissolve these boundaries and reveal them to be arbitrary. Further, her journey is not just about the lives of others. It comprises too her own search for the meaning of home and place making. Parallels and differences are drawn between her experiences and those of subjects. As Trinh recognised, "there is this constant shuttling across thresholds of insideness and outsideness even for someone who is within the culture" (1999:22). Individual lives, both her subjects and her own, are seen as connected to wider histories and socio-economic contexts, within which exist commonalities and differences.

Philosopher Gaston Bachelard saw the notion of 'home' as something largely unconscious and imagined and connected to memory (1994:5-6). These ritual days are moments in which senses of place and home are performed and imagined, through which memory is activated through bodily experiences. But that experience was then internalised too and became part of my own experience, and this was then translated through the writing of a narrative. The importance I place on the interior

life of the filmmaker was important too for filmmakers such as Chris Marker and Chantal Akerman (see, for example Akerman's *News from Home*, 1977. I have already mentioned Mekas and others). The researcher leaves 'the field' and these moments have become part of her world of associations and memories too, "incorporated into [her own] biographies, understandings, and associations" (Amit, 2000:9). All experiences presented to an audience were channeled through my own body and that of my camera. In the process I became entangled in others' homes and lives and film itself then becomes a performance of home and place-making for me, existing almost in dream and fantasy as the rituals could be said to exist for locals who take part.

### **Re-Filming, editing and soundtrack**

The inner worlds of the film and the filmmaker are an intrinsic part of the research. I retain the belief that language itself can still be an intimate and tactile way of engaging with the image and audience. But one of the motivations behind an embodied approach is the awareness of the inadequacy of language or realist cinema to convey experience. The use of narrative within the film thus works alongside other abstract and non-verbal forms of representation. Gillian Rose, alongside many other feminist writers, sees identity as multiple, shifting and contradictory. Gaps exist between the "conscious and unconscious, language and desire, discourse and excess" (1995: 333). Following de Lauretis (1990, in Rose, 1995), she emphasises "the inadequacy of language...to articulate the desires of the feminist female subject" (334), thus turning to the unconscious as a means of resisting over-identification. A moving between conscious and unconscious worlds leaves space for multiple significations and suggests an "elsewhere" beyond discourse (1995: 354). In this way, essentialist meanings are disallowed. Russell similarly acknowledges that, "Beyond the limits of representation are other realities of experience, desire, memory, and fantasy" (1999:25).

In my film, the unknowable aspects of the place and ritual, and the memories and desires of the narrator are partly expressed and explored through voice. But they are also suggested through re-filming and editing techniques, and the use of sound. Through these techniques I further confront the abstract and unconscious qualities of

embodied experience. Shifting between the use of narration and exploring the more abstract qualities of the footage through re-filming<sup>62</sup> becomes precisely a means through which to express the gaps between the experiences of subjects, filmmaker, camera and audience, the limits of language, and the transformative potential of film. By presenting these more abstract sequences, the audience is offered their own immersive embodied experiences, ones that contain affinities with those of the ritual experiences, but that are always distinctive.

These images also clearly reflect something of my own/the narrator's subjective interventions and desires to at once draw close and also to see the world anew and through film create a world of my own. The body of the camera recorded and the resultant footage contains some phenomenological essence of ritual experience already framed and distorted through technology. Back in my studio, I then further transformed and re-presented some of these original filmic experiences by re-projecting 16mm negative images onto a wall and re-filming them using a 16mm projector which had been adapted to run at variable speeds. I was thus able to experiment. The slower the footage was played back, the stronger the projector's own shutter movements became visually evident on the screen. These flickers struck me as possessing interesting qualities in parallel with ritual experience - the pulse of the projector mirrors the repetitive mesmeric beat of the ritual drum in Padstow. I chose to include these occurrences within the film, aware that this foregrounding of process contained parallels with the goals of structuralist filmmakers of the 1960s. The effects of the film running through the projector becomes an "analogue of consciousness", to borrow Sitney's analogy (2002:126), and in this case I would build upon this idea to describe it as an analogue of *ritual* consciousness. Additionally, the body of the film projector makes its presence known and seems to join with the already existing inter-relationships between the bodies of the filmmaker, camera and subjects at these moments.

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<sup>62</sup> Additional to the use of slow motion and hand-processed 16mm film that draws attention to the surface of the medium. The process of hand-developing the film in itself comprised another form of tactile encounter with the film.



Film still, *Folk in Her Machine*, (2013).

At the same time, gaps in documentary ‘truths’ are glimpsed through the inconsistent flicker of the image on the screen at these moments, and the intense colours of the negative image again bear witness to a move away from entirely realist representation. It is here, through the film negative’s re-projection, that film’s “wild” meaning is thus drawn attention to, allowing for other bodily readings of the rituals unique to the audience and removed from those of the subjects. The audience is reminded once more that all documentary is in the end a distortion of reality, requiring their own imaginative roles in the creation of meaning. Russell states that the difference between rituals and the filming of them is technology, believing that filmic reality comprises a “spectacle of ecstasy” (1999: 194) that lacks the ecstatic experience of the rituals themselves (199). However, I still aim to present within these sequences something of the transformative, perhaps at times even ecstatic, potential of film in itself, albeit through experiences very different from those of the film’s subjects. The sequences do not last long, however, and soon the social realities of the places and the narrators voice interject once more so the audience is never uncritically ‘lost’ in the images.

Ernest J. Moeran, a significant collector of folk songs around Norfolk and later West Ireland in the early to mid 1900s voiced his suspicions regarding the ‘bourgeoisisation’ of folk such as through the teaching of folk songs in schools. For him, “well-

intentioned as these efforts may be, they evolve something quite apart from the art of those who have it in their very bones, handed down from father to son” (Hill, 1985, cited in Young, 2011: 107). This film in general and the use of re-filming in my piece precisely aims to sever these rituals from their original contexts to explore what they look like from different perspectives, to address gulfs in experience and their dialogical possibilities. Any ethical questions that arise in doing so seem to some extent grounded in false notions of authenticity. But power relations undeniably form an integral part of the process of representation. The transformation of meaning also involves the transference of power from those performing the rituals to myself as filmmaker.

The re-filmed images and the construction of the ritual sequences are also meant to have a dreamlike quality. They slow down and closely scrutinise the rituals through their distortion. Deren discussed poetry as an approach to experience. For her poetry comes about in the film’s construction. She describes how the ‘horizontal’ thread to the film (storyline), might be intersected with ‘vertical’ investigations, which probe the quality and depth of the moment. They explore not what is occurring, but what it feels like or means. She writes, “intensification is carried out not by action but by the illumination of that moment”. She believes poetry creates visible forms for what is invisible, and describes the feeling or emotion or metaphysical content of the moment (Deren and Maas, 1963:n.p<sup>63</sup>). This explanation mirrors the intentions of my own re-filming methods. The moment of ritual is illuminated and the metaphysical qualities of film come to the foreground. In this way the abstract nature of experience itself becomes evident, and at the same time that experience is also transformed into something new. It is the product of the filmmakers and in turn audience’s imagination, separated from the original experiences through time and space.

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<sup>63</sup> quote from an online reproduction of this article,  
[[http://www.ubu.com/papers/poetry\\_film\\_symposium.html](http://www.ubu.com/papers/poetry_film_symposium.html)].



Film still, *Folk in Her Machine* (2013).

The interspersing of these re-filmed sequences with other images forms part of my overall approach to editing, in which, although the film has a narrative thread, there is a multi-layered approach to time. As the footage forms a kind of archive, images from different years at the traditions are placed side by side, always breaking any sense of chronological realist representation. These re-filmed sequences then further complicate the notion of time. Their dreamlike qualities situate them almost outside of time, and through the process of re-filming in the studio the audience is reminded of the heavily constructed nature of the film.

The use of repetition in the editing is also an intentional strategy. The ritual is seen once through the lens of the camera and then re-played again in different ways to further question and break apart. To counter the normalising effects of language or realist representation, the perspective of the dreamer allows a reflexive and critical approach. Susan Hiller, always looking to unearth the unknown or hidden aspects of culture that is seen as normal, became interested in the dialogical potential of working with dreams. She writes, "as a dreamer you can be simultaneously the protagonist of the dream and the viewer watching the action on the screen of the dream" (Hiller and Einzig, 1996:69). She calls this perspective a kind of 'double vision'. In this context the dreamlike imagery goes further to describe not just vision but the whole body and the nature of embodied experience. The state of both being

inside and outside of that experience thus allows for new insights and foregrounds process. Through both the construction of the voice in the film and the use of montage, there is a recognition too that “to return somewhere is different from having started off there” (Bhabha, 1992, in Trinh, 1999:25). The image and voice must then be displaced or unsettled in some way to explore these layers of meaning and experience. MacDougall writes the “resulting image doesn’t so much transcend reality as produce an alien perception of reality, sensitive to unknown qualities. The surrealism of the film image lies precisely in making us aware of a reality beyond our knowledge”(2006:17).

This play between the real and more abstract imagery in my films and the creation of an unstable viewpoint thus serves to unsettle the viewer, disturbing a passive reception of the images<sup>64</sup>, and inviting the audience to experience the familiar world anew. These new meanings, according to MacDougall, will always be personal ones, shaped by previous experiences, as well as conditioned by wider associations (1996:20). He states, “we do not necessarily feel for others, we feel for and in ourselves”. The voyeur is not disconnected; rather, vision is connected to our own bodily presences (18).

While the camera itself has an ability to “distill, intensify and concentrate experience” through framing (MacDougall, 1996:3), so too is the editing process one in which my own construction and interpretation of the images shaped the experiential outcome and added new layers of meaning. My approach to the editing was an intuitive and embodied process in itself, while also building around the structure of the film into chapters and a linear narrative that I had already started to construct. Montage can affect the viewer physically and emotionally as was recognised early in film’s history by Russian directors Dziga Vertov and Vsevolod Pudovkin. This potential was addressed in every element of my filmmaking process, but particularly in the editing and interpreting of the footage collected ‘in the field’.

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<sup>64</sup> Film critic Helene Keyssar discusses this disorientation in the work of Maya Deren and Yvonne Rainer. For her this is a frustration. She believes the audience is alienated through the ‘ephemeral ‘I’ in their work, who cannot share in that history (Keyssar, 1995:135-6). See for example Yvonne Rainer’s *Trio A* (1966). Yet in the case of my film some unsettling is an intentional strategy. Nonetheless my film overall maintains a strong connection to the real and real world referents, therefore never abstracting to the same extent.



From my archive of footage collected during the ritual days, for example, I selected only certain sequences for increased dramatic effect to build emotion and audience immersion<sup>65</sup> and allude to my own/the narrator's desire also for heightened experiences beyond the everyday. Benjamin famously asserted that technology was responsible for the loss of aura in art. But Taussig argues in response that it was not merely a question of magic being replaced by science. Film also has the capacity to bring about new embodied ways of knowing and experiencing the world (1994:208).

Finally, I would like to discuss how the use of sound in the film also reflects the embodied nature of this research while at the same time disrupting through an experimental ethnographic approach. Sound is both capable of conveying lived experience through bodily experience and the audio device's own close renderings of reality, like the camera. But a microphone, like a camera, also transforms and represents lived experience. As has already been outlined in the previous section on practical methods in the field, the soundtrack comprises audio recordings made in London, Haxey and Padstow, as well as on journeys between places. These convey certain qualities of lived experience both within, and moving through and between, these locales. But then just as the narration, re-filming and editing complicate and eschew realist representation, so too the sound compositions alter and transform the 'natural' recordings to build new layers of meaning at certain points in the film.

These compositional elements are primarily based on field recordings, which are then fragmented or distorted in some way. In this way an embodied and phenomenological connection to lived experience is maintained, and then performed and questioned.

Thematically, the compositional elements explore the idea of the ritual experiences, both real and imagined. There is a sense of the pagan, the uncanny, and the inexplicable bound up within both the rituals. Through the manipulation of the field recordings these themes are brought to the surface at times. They speak of connections to the past, both real and imagined, recent and mythical, evoked through the performances that in turn instill in locals certain senses of belonging.

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<sup>65</sup> Gardner's *Dead Birds* uses montage extensively to build emotion reminiscent of Vertov's techniques (Sherman, 1998:42).

At the same time, the heavily constructed sounds signal the filmmaker's intervention, the projection of her own (performed) desires, and imaginative readings of the rituals. In Padstow, the drumbeat is isolated from the May song in parts to suggest pagan undertones and possible connections to African trance. The later slowing down of the sound works in much the same way as the slow motion visuals. It is a means to scrutinise and transform the field recordings, and to create moments of poetic intensification. This is particularly evident in the Padstow ritual section when we are told by the narrator, "but something of these experiences slips away, seeps through the boundaries of her outsideness" (29:28). At this point in the film the imagery becomes more abstract, the 16mm footage is slowed down, and the May song itself slows too until it almost reaches a standstill. The goal of these moments is an intensely immersive experience for an audience, before the May song speeds up once more and the real time field recording re-commences.

In Haxey, the 'ancient pagan' undertones are explored by using one man's notion that the Hood is like being in a battle that connects people together. This is evoked through a compositional element that sounds like an ancient call to battle after the Fool stands on the stone to make his speech (34:00). Later, the primal grunts and chants of participants are then looped and intensified as we see re-filmed black and white shots of the ritual (36:00). At this point in the film a sonic pulse appears too like sound of the drumbeat in Padstow. The use of sound here again instills a powerful sense of an ancient ritual experience in an audience. At the same time, it draws attention to the film as a manipulation of reality. The audience witnesses an overlapping between the experiences in Haxey and Padstow as filtered through the imagination of the filmmaker.

Compositions from the ritual sections are then built into other parts of the film too. This becomes a means to suggest the interconnections between the rituals and broader senses of place. It also once more forms part of my meditation on the nature of filmmaking. The film comprises a collage of experiences fragmented and distorted in space and time. When my footsteps walk over the empty field where the game is played in Haxey, for example, and locals present narratives related to the tradition, the sounds of the sway and the composition of an ancient battle cry are woven into the texture of the film. These serve to evoke the many layers of meaning embedded in

the landscape, and the filmmaker's own imaginative journeys through space and time. At other points in the film, sounds from the rituals subtly come and go, as if blown in on the wind. The 'pagan' ritual sounds bubble up under the surface, reflecting what locals say, but are also acknowledged as perhaps just a projection of the filmmaker's own desires. Once more they signal a play between the real and imagined. It is only then in the ritual sections themselves that these sounds and compositions fully emerge to highlight the distinction between ritual and everyday space.

I have now laid out my key conceptual ideas and the ways in which I carried out my research to create the filmic outcome. In the final chapter of this thesis, I further contextualise my own investigation in the light of British folk rituals: the various ways they have been conceived and represented historically, and in recent times. I expand this discussion further to include the ways in which artists and filmmakers have represented ritual more broadly, and the influences these had on my own work.

### **Chapter 3: Folk traditions, ritual, and representation**

#### **Overview**

Folk traditions have been represented in various ways historically and more recently. While this research is primarily framed in relation to academic theory on embodiment and performance, it was also conducted mindful of the ways these and other British folk customs have been perceived, theorised and represented in historical and contemporary contexts. While traditionally folk traditions have been approached as ‘survivals’ from the past that require salvaging, today they are more commonly understood in their present day community contexts that, like the traditions themselves, continually shift and change. Representations of folk rituals have also shifted today to include conceptual and reflexive investigations, in common with my own, rather than attempts at straightforward documentation for posterity.

In this section I will discuss the ways in which folk traditions have been perceived, documented, revived and written about in recent history in Britain. I will discuss the romantic Victorian ideals of salvage that influenced late nineteenth century folklorists and beyond, and will critique the idealisations and political agendas underlying these outlooks. I will then discuss changing attitudes towards folk culture from the twentieth century until the present day, including a consideration of the specific contexts of my own research locations. I highlight the power relations still at work and the problems of representing folk customs, situating the ongoing tensions that exist between the performances of traditions and their subsequent documentation.

I will then go on to discuss filmic representations of folk traditions. As folk traditions have occupied a relatively marginal position in British culture until recently, these documentations have largely been confined to small production companies, amateurs and TV newscasts. Many of these appeared within the BFI’s recent DVD release, ‘Here’s to the Health of the Barley Mow’ (2011). Included in my discussion are two films that directly address the ‘Obby ‘Oss in Padstow and Haxey Hood. These are Alan Lomax’s *Oss Oss Wee Oss* (1953), and Stuart Brisley and Ken McMullen’s *Being and Doing* (1984). I then go on to discuss recent artistic representations of folk traditions. Many of the artists and photographers documenting or creating work addressing folk customs in Britain today featured in the recent Eastbourne show ‘Collective

Observations: Folklore and Photography – from Benjamin Stone to Flickr’, and will be further discussed. The more reflexive and performative stances adopted towards folk culture evident in some of this work bears certain resemblances to my own approach.

Finally, I will expand my discussion into a broader consideration of historical representations of ritual in relation to my work. Studies of ritual behaviour have traditionally been the domain of anthropology, and many films portraying ritual in other cultures have come about as the product of ethnographic research. These are framed within critical contexts somewhat lacking in representations of British folk culture, yet have also been limited by the rigid constraints of a discipline requiring the reduction of experience into knowledge. I then go on to discuss in more detail the ritual films of Jean Rouch, Maya Deren, Ben Russell and Cameron Jamie, who were and are influenced by, but not constrained within, ethnographic practices. I would similarly locate my own work in this way, not aiming to qualify my work for an exclusive anthropological audience, but aware of the certain critical frameworks available to me that stem from this discourse.

### **Folk traditions and folklore in historical contexts**

Far from being presented as embodied and active contemporary forms of community gathering and place-making in local landscapes, theorisations and perceptions of folklore have until recent times largely looked to the past for meaning, viewing folk customs, traditions and festivals as survivals from prehistoric eras to be documented and salvaged before their dying out.

The idea of folk culture being a remnant of a distant past was already evident in the sixteenth century interest in popular antiquities, in the work of eighteenth century Romantic writers such as Wordsworth, Coleridge and Sir Walter Scott, who promoted the virtues and superiority of country life as opposed to urban, and in the work of eighteenth and early nineteenth century antiquaries.

While these Antiquarian perceptions were already in circulation in the popular historical imagination then, it was anthropologist E.B Tylor and his peers in the late nineteenth century who developed and solidified these ideas into scientific concepts

of survival, in the belief that folk customs, rituals and festivals were remnants from earlier eras that provided important clues of times gone by. These developments were expressed in Tylor's influential book 'Primitive Culture', and later in his widely read *Anthropology* (1881), which was published for a general audience in the MacMillan's Manuals for Students Series, and later appeared in the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1902), proving greatly influential in many fields by the end of the nineteenth century (Edwards: 2012: 173-4).

Folklorists were greatly influenced by the ideas of Tylor. In 1878, supporters of an anthropological approach to folklore came together to establish the Folklore Society, through which many lectures and publications from various eminent scholars including Andrew Lang and George Laurence Gomme were produced. Its contributors shared a dedication to re-constructing a world-view of a deep past, based on contemporary remnants of times gone by<sup>66</sup>.

Gomme's climactic work, 'Folklore as an Historical Science', lays out his ideas "based upon a scientific conception of the meaning of a survival of culture. A survival that has been left stranded amidst the development that is going on around. Its future life is not one of development but of decay. We are not dealing with the evolution of a society, but with the decaying fragments of a social system which has passed away." (Gomme, 1908:319) His perception that folk customs were anachronistic and fossilized remnants that had lost any relevance or 'life-force' in their present day contexts is clear. He writes, "A custom or belief exists as a living force before it sinks back into the position of a survival." (304). But whereas for Tylor, these theories ultimately served a drive for progression and to leave the past behind, forming part of the "great liberal reforming science" of anthropology, for Gomme and other folklorists, more romantic readings of survivals motivated them. They saw it as their moral duty to ensure the survival and documentation of these vital aspects of their culture and history, which contained valuable lessons for modern times (Edwards, 2012: 174-5).

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<sup>66</sup> This "whirlpool of activity" lasting until World War One, according to Dorson (1968: 202)

As visual anthropologist and historian Elizabeth Edwards points out, these ideas inevitably contained within them assumptions and issues surrounding class, identity, authenticity and the different values associated with the terms rural and urban (175). Indeed, the image and interpretation of folk culture is one that has continued to be shaped primarily not by those performing the traditions themselves but outside influences, both reflecting the interests of certain individuals and set within broader national contexts and ideologies (Boyes, 1993).

It was Cecil Sharpe and Mary Neale who were largely responsible for the resurgence of interest in folk culture at the beginning of the twentieth century. Their focus lay primarily in folk song and dance, and they were as much concerned with reviving old songs and dances as documenting existing ones. In 1911, Sharpe founded the English Folk Dance Society, now known as the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS). Alongside other enthusiasts, such as Ralph Vaughan Williams, he was responsible for reviving and disseminating these 'dying' elements of English culture through education, workshops, performance and documentation (Boyes, 1993:2).

Despite Sharpe and his contemporaries clearly being responsible for this renewed interest in folk, various commentators have nonetheless raised questions surrounding the 'authenticity' of the customs and songs revived, and the ideals underpinning the movement (Brocken, 2003; Boyes, 1993). Brocken notes that only a few of the dances that were taught and disseminated were based on contemporary dances that Sharpe himself had attended<sup>67</sup>, and the revival relied heavily on arranging and orchestrating dance and song passed on from individuals whose reliability was cast with some doubt (Brocken 2003:5).

The issues of idealisation, perspective and privilege highlighted are similar to those connected to earlier eras. One of the consequences of this revival, for example, was the emergence of a whole 'folk' subculture that embodied certain notions of traditional Englishness, and with underlying Arcadian connotations. As Boyes points out, many of the rural working class ideals within which this folk revival was presented did not reflect the reality of village life in the nineteenth and twentieth

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<sup>67</sup> According to Brocken (2003), Bampton, Enysham and Headington were the only villages where Sharpe witnessed complete Morris teams perform.

centuries (1993: 1-10). The revival also relied upon the continued perceptions of dying cultures, the creation of 'Otherness' prevalent in previous eras (15), and romantic ideas surrounding the virtues of country life as opposed to urban (7)<sup>68</sup>. Clifford argues that the notion of disappearing cultures underlying this type of 'salvage ethnography' has pervaded anthropological discourse, used as a means to legitimate their representation (1986:112). He questions the assumption that, "with rapid change something essential ('culture'), a coherent differential identity, vanishes", and disputes too, "the mode of scientific and moral authority associated with salvage, or redemptive, ethnography. It is assumed that the other society is weak and 'needs' to be represented by an outsider...the recorder and interpreter of fragile custom is custodian of an essence, unimpeachable witness to an authenticity. (Moreover, since the true culture has always vanished, the salvaged version cannot easily be refuted.)" (113.)

The problem is then one of translation and power. Experience is solidified and transformed into text, or other forms of knowledge, and those presiding over this process have largely been privileged scholars or collectors distanced from their original sources in space and time. In the context of Cecil Sharpe and the Edwardian revivalists who ventured out on their collecting trips, music critic Rob Young points out that some read their activities as a form of cultural theft. They extracted information from interviewees and profited from selling publications of music, lyrics and dances, while the country folk themselves did not benefit. Folk music was, after all, "first and foremost the People's music: harboured and preserved in the common mind through the decades and centuries, and sung and danced without the 'permission' of the cultural elite or the scrutiny of a trendsetting media." (Young, 2011: 117).

Despite these criticisms, folklorist Georgina Boyes notes a variety of apparently contradictory ideological premises within the folk revival, and other potential readings. On the one hand, there can be seen a deep conservatism, the desire to

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<sup>68</sup> In a similar vein, Raymond Williams's 1973 'The Country and the City' considers the ways the city and country have been represented in literature since the sixteenth century, portraying the virtues of a simple and natural existence as opposed the problems of the city. Williams calls this "a myth functioning as a memory" that belies realities of class conflict and enmity present through those periods. (Williams, 1973:43)



preserve tradition and revert to the past, but on the other, active performances were also seen as a means to bring about revolutionary change, through working class and independent communities carrying out traditions untouched by capitalism and commercial influences (1993:3-4).

The attitudes of folklorists were also shifting following the death of Cecil Sharpe in 1924, and the appointment of Douglas Kennedy in 1932 as head of the English Folk Dance and Song Society in the newly built Cecil Sharpe House. Kennedy was aware of the need to revitalise and make more accountable the activities of an anachronistic Society, and increasingly questioned the bourgeois values upon which it was founded (Watts, 2012: 52).

It was the more radical potential of folk traditions, seen as existing outside of the mainstream of capitalist culture, that later appealed to post-war generations and the 1960s and 70s counterculture, who also embraced the perceived simple virtues of folk culture, in what has been labelled the second folk revival of the twentieth century. Ewan McColl and A.L Lloyd for example, both members of the Communist party, influenced a new generation through their recordings of industrial songs and ballads (Young, 2011: 153).

While in the last ten years there has once more been a resurgence of interest in folk culture, there is little writing as yet charting this new trend or its positioning in wider contexts. What is inevitable, corroborated by my research, is that idealisations, projections, and contradictions are still at work. Much of the recent interest in folk customs has largely stemmed from urban dwellers rather than the communities themselves. However, caution must be expressed in generalising too much. Many perceptions and representations are more critical than in the past, and it is now broadly recognised that these traditions play important roles in local community lives. The old model of salvage ethnography is not entirely absent in the popular imagination, but those who know a little about the events or have witnessed them themselves recognise their 'living' value today, and the ways the traditions continue to change to reflect the specific contexts in which they are performed. Power relations are still inevitably at work in the representation and dissemination of folk culture, and there continue to be little documentation of folk traditions from those

who take part<sup>69</sup>. Local perceptions and experiences largely remain unexpressed. This is partly due to the nature of folk traditions, as their articulation is seen to be in the performances themselves.

For local communities, it is nonetheless in reality the interplay between inside and outside factors that forms their present day realities and has helped shaped the traditions. Taking Padstow as an example, it was the interest taken in the tradition by the folk scene in the 1960s that arguably helped ensure its continued survival. The lack of local musicians in the Old 'Oss band was compensated for by members of the EFDSS being invited to join in and play drums and accordions. The 'Oss also used to tour around parts of South West England, and made an appearance at the International Folk Dance Festival at the Royal Albert Hall between the two World Wars. These factors reflect a spirit of openness during that era, in conditions very different to the present day. Today, in contrast, the 'Oss is kept within the town throughout the year, and touring elsewhere would be unthinkable. 'External' musicians associated with the revival have mainly been phased out through their passing away. And now, to ensure none but 'local' men join in the Old 'Oss band on Mayday, real pig skin drums were also introduced a few years ago, played by a select few. While these traditions are so often presented as unchanged, in reality their active performances are constantly shifting, responding to ever-changing contexts. Another example of the interplay between inside and outside influences is the common way Mayday is referred to as an ancient Pagan custom by locals, for example in the 'Old 'Oss leaflet handed out to tourists on the day. This language helps authenticate the community's ancestral links to the tradition and their town's 'ancient' heritage. Yet as previously stated, it was 'outsider' Peter Thurstan, in 1913, who first suggested the tradition's pagan origins, generating renewed interest and introducing this emotive vocabulary that would then serve claims to ownership, authenticity and belonging.

I aim to illustrate through the above examples the inter-relations, both historically and in the present day, between those performing traditions and those who have taken interest from the outside. It is through these encounters and points of tension

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<sup>69</sup> I later discuss the proliferation of affordable technology and mobile phone cameras that have, however, meant that locals photographing, filming, and disseminating images of their traditions via social media is now commonplace.

that meaning emerges, and arguably through which folk culture maintains relevance and vitality today. Young writes, “if it is to thrive, and not stagnate, it will continue to need the friction between conservatism and progression, city and country...homespun and visionary, familiar and uncanny.” (Young, 2011: 9).

Returning to the development of the late nineteenth century folklore movement, it was a discourse bound up within the complexity of Victorian social hierarchy, in which “scholars structured their results in accordance with a world view that stemmed entirely from the top-down”. Historian Olly Douglas argues for a deeper acknowledgement of the social realities and contexts in which materials were gathered (2009<sup>70</sup>). In 1908, Gomme wrote that the analysis of customs in terms of their “separate parts” enabled folklorists to “disentangle” them from the “personal or social strat[a]” in which they were presented, as each item might “have become attached to a place, an object, a season, a class of persons, a rule of life, and....preserved by means of this attachment.” (cited in Douglas, 2009:n.p). Rather than conceal these processes, it is precisely, “this very ‘entanglement’ of historical, individual and social factors from which Gomme aspired to extricate evidence” that I, like Douglas, perceive to be of interest. Douglas refers to the collaborative processes between fieldworker and informant, the social networks through which data was collected, and the wider social narrative of the folklore movement as all playing a part in the creation of meaning at that time, just as continues to be the case in the context of my own research. It is through transparency and reflexivity in my own work that I aim to reveal some of the processes and power relations it is also bound up in. While the ‘evidence’ collected via the folklore movement was primarily in the form of objects, or translated into text, my use of film transparently embodies something of the essence of experience and place from the outset through the medium I use. Context is entangled in my own subjectivity. My investigation also uses narratives of local people at the two traditions and an inclusion of social context to redress something of this balance. And through an emphasis on performativity, I do not pretend to convey any fixed documentary ‘truths’<sup>71</sup>. Nonetheless, hierarchical

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<sup>70</sup> [Http://england.prm.ox.ac.uk/englishness-Douglas-paper.html](http://england.prm.ox.ac.uk/englishness-Douglas-paper.html). Last accessed 12.02.13

<sup>71</sup> For Brocken, from the outset the folk revival was decidedly middle class and urban, but also predominantly male (2003:3). I think in terms of gender a (performed, non-essentialised) female

relationships still exist between myself as creator of meaning, and subjects, and I remain acutely aware of the politics of representation.

### **Representing folk traditions**

Following on from the argument from the previous section, representations of folk culture through the twentieth century have adopted different perspectives and styles. These reflect various underlying agendas and ideologies in which the film or photograph was made, and most often also infused with a spirit of romanticism.

One of the earliest folk dances on film emphasises Cecil Sharpe's participatory attitude to folk culture (*Hey Boys, Up We Go*, on *Films Taken from Kinora Spools Made in 1912*) in which he is seen taking part. Yet film surprisingly played little part in Sharpe's own attempts at revival and documentation (Taylor: 2011:1-2). It was not until the 1950s that the EDFSS instigated a collection of films on folk culture, both professional and amateur, with the aim of documenting and archiving these aspects of English culture. These included *Abbots Bromley, Painswick and Bampton* (c.1928-1936), *Bacup Coconut Dancers* (1930), and amateur footage on *Castleton Garland Day* (1957). These films primarily comprise simple static shots of the rituals and dances themselves for posterity, with minimal intervention and without further commentary or any suggestion of wider context<sup>72</sup>.

The EFDSS, under the new direction of Douglas Kennedy, was also involved with funding films, and a more overtly subjective stance was taken in their production, often influenced by fiction filmmaking conventions. Alan Simpson's *Wake up and Dance* (1950) is an exuberant film about traditional folk dancing in Stratford upon Avon. Framed from the staged perspective of a woman who abandons her mundane

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perspective is an interesting form of subjective stance that has not been fully explored in the past in these contexts.

<sup>72</sup> Today, new meanings are layered onto the footage. Most of these images are heavily degraded and scratched thus drawing attention to the materiality of the medium and the presence of the filmmaker. In the Castleton Garland Day amateur footage, many shots are out of focus, arguably drawing attention back to the image and the way it was created rather than purely its content.

washing duties to join in the gaieties, the film formed part of a drive to awaken interest in these aspects of traditional English culture. According to Roud, it successfully brought about a 'boom' in country and folk dancing. (Roud, 2011:10).

Another of these films, *Oss Oss Wee Oss* (1953), produced by Kennedy's son Peter and directed by Alan Lomax, is of particular relevance for its representation of Mayday in Padstow. Despite being a romanticised vision, it can be seen as a "groundbreaking attempt to articulate the social and participatory power of folk dance and custom through film." (Taylor, 2011:2). The film is based on a conversation between local 'May-er' <sup>73</sup> Charlie Bate and Londoner Charlie Chilton, to whom he explains the tradition. This viewpoint suggests the collaborate spirit in which the work was made, to some extent helping offset any authoritarian 'outsider' perspective. And yet the film is clearly set up and highly stylised to reflect the filmmaker's own vision as much as the events themselves. As highlighted by Fowler, then, questions might still be raised as to who the work was made for, and to what ends (2011:39). The ultimate power of representation and editing in this case still lies with the filmmakers. Their motivation for making it again fitted into a wider agenda of promoting folk culture<sup>74</sup>.

In the 1970s, within the climate of a renewed interest in folk traditions as described in the previous section, Barry Callaghan and Ian Russell set up Garland Films with the aim of documenting folk customs, producing films such as *Derby Tup*, about an 'ancient' Mumming tradition (1974), and *Dick Hewitt 'The Norfolk Step Dancer' with Percy Brown –melodeon* (1979). In *Derby Tup*, the tradition is presented against the backdrop of encroaching suburbia, and as an act of playful defiance against change. The brief suggestion of broader context in this film shares something of my own intentions. However, here these claims are made by an authoritarian male voiceover following mainstream documentary conventions at the time.

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<sup>73</sup> The term 'May-er' is used by local Padstonians to refer to dedicated participants in the tradition.

<sup>74</sup> Another point Fowler makes is that the film did have an impact locally. As well as being screened back, the year it was made locals decided to dress up in red and white, a tradition that has now continued every year since. Locals today central to the tradition also frequently watch the film back and use it as a reference point to check that their performances and dancing are still in keeping with how it was done 'back then', something that would have been impossible without this 'outside' intervention.

In terms of TV and radio representations, in the late 1950s, the BBC recorded folk music from all over Britain and Ireland for radio broadcast. Folk events and traditions also appeared on TV newscasts, but these representations largely presented folk culture as quirky and eccentric sources of entertainment<sup>75</sup>. This has been an outlook reflected in the media in general over the years, including the genre of travel writing<sup>76</sup>, and news headlines that have often offended local people and left them feeling misrepresented<sup>77</sup>. There are exceptions to this, however. *The Future of Things Past*, a BBC documentary on folk traditions made in 1986 is a beautifully shot and poetic piece, taking the viewer on a journey through the ritual year which evokes certain senses of place and ritual experience at those moments through intimate and respectful portrayals of the events. The slant here, however, is still a romanticised one, emphasising a connection to the past ‘lost in the mists of time’, and framed by an authoritarian male voiceover<sup>78</sup>. Locals are nonetheless given a voice in the film through some interviews, and both Haxey Hood and Padstow’s Mayday feature in this film. Recently, a more personal film focusing on one tradition performed in one place was made by Tim Plester entitled *The Way of the Morris* (2011). He returns to the village where he grew up to re-engage with and try for himself a custom that had never previously interested him. His reflections express some of the conflicts he felt in taking part in this form of English dance that is often ridiculed from the outside, but is meaningful for those who take part.

In terms of amateur representations of folk traditions, the proliferation of affordable technology and the increased popularity of the events today means that at every tradition there are always spectators and locals filming and photographing, on digital cameras and mobile phones, alongside the presence of more mainstream media or

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<sup>75</sup> There are also fragments of TV news coverage remaining from prior to this period. The earliest visual record of Haxey Hood is a one-minute fragment of film shot by the Topical Film Company in 1929. There is a sense of the footage of the game itself being set up, but as with the early films previously mentioned, the degradation of the image creates interesting new layers of meaning when viewing the footage today.

<sup>76</sup> See, for example *True Brits* (Daeschner. J.R, 2004), in which an American travels around Britain and presents the folk customs he encounters as eccentric and hilarious.

<sup>77</sup> A much quoted news headline described Haxey Hood as ‘Mayhem in cabbage field’. Locals told me defiantly “it’s not mayhem, and it doesn’t take place in a cabbage field”.

local news teams at most of the larger events. What is particularly interesting about these informal documents that might later appear on YouTube or be posted via social media networks, is their ability to express some of the more dynamic and visceral qualities of the rituals from intimate and participatory perspectives. Hand-held and shaky low resolution camera footage often gives a clearer sense of 'being there' than the more common static media shots taken from a distance. That is why in this research, when I was unable to get into the sway in Haxey, the use of footage given to me by a man shooting with a hidden camera in the film provides a valuable perspective. It sets up an interesting dialogue between my own footage and his, reflecting boundaries to my 'knowing' the events. Power relations in the film also temporarily shift in the film through this intimate 'insider' viewpoint.

Of particular note in the capturing of amateur footage, Doc Rowe, now an established figure in the folklore scene, has been documenting folk traditions around the country since the 1960s. In doing so, he has collected the most extensive archive of the events in existence. His vast collection of footage from over the years reflects something of the changing technology as well as the rituals themselves and their shifting contexts. He has moved from shooting on 16mm film to progressively smaller digital cameras, and last time I saw him in January 2013 in Haxey, he was filming with a GoPro camera held above the performers on a monopod. When asked about his approach to filming the traditions, he always insists he is interested in purely archiving and does not believe in intervening in the traditions in any way. Yet his own subjective hand-held style, drawing in close and moving around the action, and the obsessive nature of his filmmaking over many years, have much to say about his own implication in the materials. They underline once more too the fallacy of objective documentary 'truth'<sup>79</sup>. His footage has been used in many different contexts over the years and to different ends. A few films for example were presented as part of artists Jeremy Deller and Alan Kane's Folk Archive exhibition at the Barbican. Deller provides another contemporary example of the different contexts and interpretations of folk culture, the footage in this context raised to the status of 'high art' and for a largely urban

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<sup>79</sup> He is also such a well-known figure at all the events he returns to that much of his footage shows evidence of people joking and interacting with him - his films are also thus about encounters with the people he meets.

middle class audience by being displayed in gallery contexts alongside other folk objects (Deller and Kane, 2005).

Despite few overtly critical and reflexive representations of folk culture in film and TV, beyond the mainstream there have been some. The most notable examples are visual artist Stuart Brisley and experimental filmmaker Ken McMullen's *Being and Doing* (1984), and experimental filmmaker Richard Philpott's *The Flora Faddy Furry Dance Day* (1989). In common with my own work they address not just folk culture itself but wider issues surrounding art and filmic representation.

Brisley and McMullen's *Being and Doing* (1984), contains footage of both Haxey Hood and Mayday in Padstow, set within a broader meditation on performance. At the start of the film, footage is shown of the two traditions and the voiceover states, "All behaviour is performance. Performance behaviour is a condition of art. Performance behaviours are ghost dances in a dying culture". The film draws a parallel between performance and ritual – in essence, both are about experiences that take place in real space and time, without the need for interpretation. The audience is told, "Performance is made up of moments, where the performer behaves according to an inner reality, unhampered by notions of how things should be done." There is a sense of underlying political struggle within the film, a sense of nostalgia for times gone by. The voiceover states, "Pre-industrial ritual unconsciously acts out a concept of utopian democracy where all become one. Contemporary performance incorporates a concept of utopian democracy but rarely expresses it in reality." The film mourns "the alienation of people linked to modes of production and processes of nature", and therefore sees the liberating potential of both performance and ritual as standing outside of systems of power. This recognition of the cohesive power of ritual is similar to the perspective in my own work. There is, however, a romanticism underlying the piece. By idealising the past and presenting cultures and values as being in the process of being destroyed, the filmmakers adopt viewpoints similar to those informing salvage ethnography. Despite this problem in the framing of the film, it is still a powerful and evocative exploration of performative behaviour, both through folk traditions, and through other theatrical investigations.



In *The Flora Faddy Furry Dance Day* (1989), Philpott also focuses on the embodied and performative elements of a seasonal custom that takes place each year in Helston in Cornwall. He writes that the film follows the structure of the Flora Day to emphasise the “music and dance repetitions as a way of stimulating collective unconscious emotions” (Philpott, 2011:22), thereby seeing the rituals as having potential to transcend the everyday. At the end of the film, he himself briefly joins in and spins around, hinting at a potential collapsing of boundaries between his own experiences and those of participants akin to my own work. His work could also be read as an enquiry into the possibilities of film to also perhaps evoke certain emotional states in an audience. He states that contrary to the main current of experimental film in the UK being within the structuralist/materialist milieu at the time the film was produced, he chose instead to try and transcend materialist concerns and “break through into a visionary realm” (Philpott, 2011: 23). However, his representation is still arguably a highly romantic one<sup>80</sup>, creating an idealistic link to the past akin to those of many folklorists of the past, and isolating the ritual experience from the wider social context at the time it was made<sup>81</sup>. While my own work draws on a sense of the uncanny and potentially mystical qualities of the events, I keep them grounded in the everyday by layering them with social realities. Philpott does, however, refer to and explore the qualities and potential of the medium in conveying ritual experience, amounting to some level of reflexivity. His approach is also arguably an embodied one in the way he places himself into the action in an act of imagining and empathy.

Philpott’s enquiry into the transcendental qualities of ritual is one that draws comparisons both with the seminal films on ritual by Maya Deren and Jean Rouch of the 1960s, and more recently, the work of Ben Russell, thus leading into a broader consideration of the representations of other rituals on film, aside from the specific context of British folk customs.

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<sup>80</sup> Philpott terms the tradition “an ancient pre-Christian Spring ritual”, and claims the rituals evoke “deeper echoes within the labyrinthine form which appears in Neolithic Henge Monuments and processional structures” (Philpott, 2011:22).

Before moving into a general consideration of ritual on film, including the above filmmakers, I will briefly consider the key photographers and artists who have presented work on British folk ritual over the last century. They include amateur photographer Sir Benjamin Stone, Homer Sykes, Tony Ray Jones, and most recently, Sara Hannant<sup>82</sup>. Before describing the work of the latter three photographers, I want to comment upon Benjamin Stone's influential body of work. For many he is seen as the founding figure in the documentation of British folk traditions, and has influenced many subsequent generations of photographers through his appealing, romantic and "neo-surrealist" images (Edwards, 2012:249). Yet Edwards argues that this art-historiographical privileging of his work over the images of other photographers at the time has concealed the context in which they were made, and the broader history and agendas underlying the work. His images were part of a much larger body of work, shot by him and others, created as part of the National Photographic Record Association<sup>83</sup> and survey movements of the time. These formed part "of the massive, late nineteenth century expansion of encyclopaedic endeavours harnessing photography, both pro and amateur, for the national good" (Edwards, 2006:8). Nonetheless, it is Stone's work that has come to stand for the whole survey movement, and has been cited as an inspiration for contemporary photographers such as Tony Ray Jones and Homer Sykes. Through exhibitions and publication, his work has been recoded, romantic readings endlessly repeated, foregrounding these perspectives at the expense of others (Edwards 2012:250).

The more recent work of Tony Ray Jones, Homer Sykes and Sara Hannant all broadly fits into the photojournalism/documentary genre. While Stone's images are set up for the camera, primarily due to the technological need for long exposures at the time, these photographers' images are instead captured in their performative contexts. They include in the frame details of the customs, both mundane and strange, as well as something of the places and the communities where they are performed. There is still a certain romance at work, however. Homer Sykes photos, for example, are shot in black and white, and Hannant is interested in the pagan connections she sees

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<sup>82</sup> Doc Rowe has a large collection of photographic images of seasonal folk customs too, but his work has been mentioned previously.

<sup>83</sup> Formed by Stone himself in 1897.

within folk traditions, presenting images of the customs alongside new age events such as the Summer and Winter solstices at Stonehenge and celebrations marking the Celtic festival Belthane. (2011). While photography, like film, contains a glimpse of phenomenological reality in its frame, and in different ways could also be seen as a tactile medium, the sensory experiences of the rituals by the audience is more limited here, their being frozen in time, and without audio as additional means of conveying a sense of ritual experience to an audience. Each of these photographers captured their images by touring around Britain, with fleeting visits to each ritual, rather than an in-depth enquiry into any one context. Tony Ray Jones credits Stone as an influence in his own “surveylike” work, as a project of “cultural retrieval and recuperation” (Edwards, 2012: 249). The images nonetheless do create certain senses of place and are evocative snapshots of the times they were taken.

Aside from those working within conventional documentary photography genres, certain contemporary photographers have approached folk customs through more critical and reflexive means. Faye Claridge contrives studio portraits of actors dressed up as performers in rituals that are at once familiar and strange. In a series entitled, ‘Descendants of the Unfamiliar’ (2012), a woman with a blacked-up face holds a hat adorned with flowers, while a man dressed in rags and holding a long pole, looks distinctly like the fool at Haxey Hood. In one image, a hood completely obscures the sitter’s face. There is a certain disjunction in the images. The actors are asked to pose and then at the last minute the photographer changes certain details of the scene to create a sense of unease, and to call into question the identity and authenticity of the subjects being portrayed. Her interests in exploring notions of identity, memory, self and other, through performance bear some similarities to my own work, although the studio-based photographic context provides a different conceptual framework compared to my own. Just as folk traditions themselves often rely on concealment, shape-shifting and performance, so then the process of image-making here foregrounds these same themes to disrupt simplistic readings and to highlight reflexivity.

New Zealand born Matthew Cowan, working across film, photography, installation and sculpture, also looks at folk ritual and folk memory in Britain and Europe, often with humour pervading the work. In ‘Devil of the Day & Devil of the Night’ (2011),

mythical creatures are constructed from drinking straws based on accounts of devil sightings across Wales in the 1700s, and a Morris Dancer performs jumping up and down on a bouncy castle at Cecil Sharpe House in *A Morris Dancer Should Never Appear to Touch the Ground* (2009). As with Claridge, Cowan's work is a useful reference point for its translation and disruption of folk culture and folk myths into performative and critical contexts. In these cases, however, they are far removed from the social realities of the communities where they take place. Finally, Henry Bourne, commercial photographer, created a series of portraits of participants in annual customs around Britain taken in costume in a studio, each in front of a plain white background. De-contextualised entirely from the places and customs in which they are performed, they offer no sense of place and community, instead perhaps reflecting more the commercial art culture and fashion aesthetic into which the images are subsumed and reproduced. Nonetheless, the intricate detail of the costumes, the almost "forensic"<sup>84</sup> attention paid to the incredible fabrics and colours of the costumes created and used at various customs become possible only through a styled, studio backdrop. These investigations into an aspect of folk customs are interesting, but reflect concerns very different to my own research.

The work of Claridge, Cowan, and Bourne was recently presented in the exhibition 'Collective Observations: Folklore and Photography – from Benjamin Stone to Flickr', alongside the work of Benjamin Stone, Sara Hannant, Doc Rowe and others<sup>85</sup>. This exhibition explored many of the themes already discussed in relation to the individual artists. The show provided a broad overview of the various ways in which folk has been represented, both historically and in contemporary contexts, through stills photography, sculpture and film. The aim as a whole seemed to be not to privilege any single reading or narrative of the traditions, instead remaining open to many possibilities. The belief in the collective ownership of the representation of folk traditions was demonstrated on the final screen of the exhibition, in which images shot by locals themselves were displayed. Through the proliferation of affordable

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<sup>84</sup> This wording was used in the description of this work in the show described in the next paragraph.

<sup>85</sup> The show took place at the Towner Gallery in Eastbourne, 13<sup>th</sup> October 2012-13<sup>th</sup> January 2013.

technology today, these types of images are widely disseminated through social media by locals after each event, and form important means through which the customs are known, documented and subsequently shared. However, the opening text by historian Ronald Hutton seemed at odds with the show itself. He writes that the work is a “valuable contribution to the visual record of seasonal rites, as pioneered and inspired by Sir Benjamin Stone onwards” He writes the representations are “especially important to a historian as they are unmediated records of events and activities presented to the future without the filter of the literary author’s capacity to observe and describe.” Once more Stone is isolated as a single figure responsible for first recording these events. And Hutton’s claim to the work being “unmediated” is far from the subjective and performative approaches evident in the diverse work on display.

### **Other representations of ritual by anthropologists and beyond**

The discourse of anthropology has historically focused much energy on trying to understand and analyse ritual, largely in contexts far from home. The folklore and traditions of Britain have been documented in perhaps much less critical terms through the course of the last century. This is primarily due to their not being under the scrutiny of any particular academic discipline. Anthropologists’ depictions of rituals, on the other hand, have formed part of a contentious and ongoing discourse surrounding the possibilities of empirically understanding the experiences of others. These concerns have been closely bound up with questions regarding the ethics and politics of representation, particularly in colonial and post-colonial contexts.

Films addressing ritual experience that have been made by anthropologists, or have more broadly been labelled as ethnographic, have been both approached and written about in different ways. As already discussed in Chapter 1, within anthropology, possibilities for capturing ritual experience have often been constrained by the need to legitimise film as a form of scientific enquiry. Mead and Bateson’s viewpoint in *Trance and Dance in Bali* (1952), for example, in which a voice-over throughout explains in detail to the viewer each stage of the trance, despite one of the aims of the research being to portray “intangible aspects of culture” (Grimshaw, 2001: 88).

Robert Gardner's films, working outside of the constraints of the discipline, provide examples of a more lyrical approach to ritual experience. Ritual sequences are set within the broader context of community life, relying more on imagery and sensory experience than on explanation. An authorial voice is strongly present in the work in different ways. Sequences are often heavily constructed, such as the famous fight scene in *Dead Birds* (1963), which comprises a montage of footage shot at different times. This film, alongside others, is one in which real lived experience is framed as a mythical story, imagined and performed by the filmmaker. The films seem as much the product of the filmmaker's imagination as an external reality<sup>86</sup>.

While a detailed and extensive history of this genre is beyond the scope of this thesis, most commentators do however now recognise the performative and fictional nature of all documentary filmmaking, the resultant 'truths' in some way being the product of the subjective encounter between filmmaker and filmed rather than any pre-existing reality.

Arguably the most influential and interesting filmmakers who have focused on ritual and ritual experience, and also used ethnographic approaches and influences, have been Rouch, Deren and Russell. All are to some extent interested not just in an external reality but the transcendental or even potentially trance-inducing qualities of the medium itself, and the subjective presence of the filmmaker. Jean Rouch, for example, was interested in his own altered bodily state as he participated and filmed rituals in *Les Maitres Fous* (1955), using the term 'cine-trance', to describe the parallels between his own experiences and the rituals he was representing (Rouch, 2003: 99). Of central importance to all his films was the idea of encounter, foregrounding his own subjective presence that then shaped the reality he represented.

Deren's use of black and white slow motion to convey ritual in *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (1953) also pertains to a highly subjective and poetic reading of ritual and trance. The point of view and style of the film never pretends to objectify,

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<sup>86</sup> See also *The Nuer*, (1971), and *Forest of Bliss* (1986). In *Forest of Bliss*, a sensory depiction of funeral rites on the River Ganges, there is no voiceover at all.

and the absence of dialogue allows the viewer to become immersed in the movement and sound. The dream-like quality of this and other films of Deren's also reflect her interest in the subconscious, as previously discussed<sup>87</sup>. Through poetic, slowed-down images she explores the potential blurring of the experiences between self and other, inner and outer worlds. These connect to my interest in embodied filmmaking as a means to explore haptic and optic forms of knowing, the play between the conscious and sub-conscious, using similar techniques<sup>88</sup>.

Russell, in her work on experimental ethnography, noted that filmmakers such as Rouch, Deren and Bill Viola<sup>89</sup> were drawn to possession ritual precisely because it "replicates the utopian drive of the cinema: to produce a total hallucination, a complete illusion of reality". Yet for her the filmmaker is destined to failure, providing only a "document of a hallucination". The spectator may never enter into the experience completely and "filmic reality is wanting, lacking the ecstatic potential of the ritual." (1999: 199).

Despite the powerful images of *Divine Horsemen*, Deren herself seemed to share Russell's views and doubted the ability of her footage to convey in satisfactory ways the integrity of the rites themselves. Instead, she set the footage aside to be later completed by her third husband, focusing on writing about ritual in what was arguably a highly analytical and much less evocative way (Deren, 1953). While it is certain that the viewer can never enter into the experiences of those taking part in the rituals, this research nonetheless is interested in embodied ways of knowing that are made possible through film despite difference. Through multi-sensory and phenomenological engagement with the subject, certain empathetic connections are set up between filmmaker, audience and subject to create a dialogical and embodied relationship. Cinema is able to evoke altered embodied experiences through its de-familiarising forms, and creating the world anew, forming connections and parallels with subjects' experiences but always distinctive from them.

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<sup>87</sup> See also *Meshes in the Afternoon* (1943).

<sup>89</sup> Bill Viola includes scenes of Fijians in trances walking on red-hot coals, piercing their skin with red-hot skewers and eating fire, in *I Do Not Know What It Is I Am Like* (1986).

These issues seem to be recognised in the contemporary work of Ben Russell. He is directly interested in the effects of filmmaking and trance on an audience. Arguably, his concerns differ from Rouch and Deren's work on ritual. Their primary goals seemed to be to better understand and replicate the trances themselves, whereas Russell claims to be exploring more their transformation through film, and the effect of the images on the viewer. He describes cinema as a form of "alchemical transformation and otherworldly transportation", and claims his own work forms part of an ongoing interest in "secular spiritualism" (cited in Balsom, 2011: n.p).

There seem to be certain affinities here between Russell's goals and those of certain filmmakers of the 1960s previously mentioned, interested in exploring the nature of consciousness through film. While they were mostly concerned with the metaphysical qualities of the medium over lived experience, in this case, Russell instead addresses these themes both through filming ritual and other subjects, believing that cinematic experience shares certain qualities with trance and ritual. The work is always critical and playful in approach, never allowing the full immersion into the experience. Trypps 1-8 series (2005-ongoing), for example, focuses on real and psychedelic journeys from around the world, both reflecting on, and aiming to induce altered modes of being. *Trypps Number Three* (2006) portrays members of the audience during a performance by Rhode Island noise band Lightning Bolt, in which ecstatic faces bear witness to their complete immersion in the music and their trance-like states. In *Trypps Number Seven (Badlands)* (2010), a woman on a psychedelic drug-trip stands in front of the camera staring into the lens. The audience initially believes they are simply witnessing the transformed state of the subject being filmed from the outside. Yet the cinematic illusion is broken when in the second half of the film the image is revealed as being projected onto a mirror. This surface starts to slowly spin around, revealing the desert landscape behind. Things are not as they appear. The viewer is swallowed into their own hallucinatory journey as the mirror continues to flip around and around, presenting strange and disorientating visions of the Badlands National Park landscape, in Dakota, U.S.A where it is shot. In this way the audience must reflect on cinematic experience too as an altered state. In *Let Each One Go Where He May* (2009), Russell attempts to induce a form of 'cinema trance' in a different way through repetition and duration. During the whole of the film's 135 minutes, as



already described in Chapter 1, the camera follows closely behind the film's subjects as they walk, the subjects' few words are not translated, and no further explanation is offered. Russell intends that this embodied and intimate perspective might "shift our cultural and physical selves in relation to other selves" (in Guarneri, 2012, n.p), demanding audience participation in the creation of meaning, while at the same time being taken on their own embodied journeys through the camera's movements. I would express some doubt as to whether Russell succeeds in achieving his goal of inducing trance-like states in an audience through his films. But they certainly evoke reflexive responses, and his interest in the effects of film on an audience is a pertinent line of enquiry when positioned alongside my own work.

Continuing on similar themes, *Kranky Klaus* (2002-3) by artist Cameron Jamie is also effective in similar ways in its documentation of the annual Krampus rituals in the snow-bound village in Bad Gastein Valley, Salzburg, Austria. Throughout the film we follow the figures of masked men disguised as horned, hairy beasts, and their encounters with various local people on their rampage around the area. One person is wrestled to the ground and certain 'victims' are visibly upset by the rough confrontations. Through the use of hand-held camera and drawing close to the action, the audience themselves experience the visceral qualities of the rituals as the men terrorise the villagers. The limits of acceptable violence is called into question through the audience's own bodily empathy. It is the immersive qualities of this filmic experience that, for anthropologist Chris Wright, make this an effective portrayal of ritual (2010: 71). There is no explanation offered to an audience, and they must instead rely on their own bodily experiences to understand them. In this way Wright sees precisely the *lack of* context here as productive, unlike much anthropology that sub-ordinates experience to context (74).

Russell and Jamie's desires to address the embodied experiences of audience through certain approaches to real lived and ritual experiences are ones that perhaps most closely mirror my own concerns, despite the approaches themselves being distinctive. My work contains similarities in approach, such as hand-held, embodied camera-work at times similar to Jamie's, or following behind and mirroring subjects, in a similar vein to Russell. In doing so I hope also to create a kind of empathetic and distinctive bodily experience in the audience. While Wright sees the liberating

potential of ritual conveyed without any context, his writing is largely in response to an anthropological discourse that privileges context and language at the expense of multi-sensory experience. My investigation instead is interested precisely in the interplay *between* the experiences themselves and wider contexts. One of the main criticisms around Maya Deren's ritual work in particular, is her lack of understanding or inclusion of the wider social context or politics of the trace sequences she filmed<sup>90</sup>. For me, there are political and ethical responsibilities in documentary filmmaking, and the need and some understanding and transmission of context by the filmmaker.

To conclude this discussion of film and summarise films on folk and ritual in relation to my own work, this research draws and builds upon existing representations and conceptions of ritual. It does so, unlike most of the examples provided, as part of a broader investigation into place and belonging. These distinctive annual experiences are positioned in relation to everyday life and socio-economic contexts on local and broader scales, and in relation to my own performed perspectives. Many of the films discussed above are also set within the context of trance in other cultures such as Africa, Haiti, Fiji and Suriname. These backdrops raise a whole set of different issues and problems related to cinematic representation in colonial and post-colonial contexts. Nonetheless, they provide relevant points of comparison to the heightened and altered states of people participating in Haxey Hood and Mayday in Padstow, and the ways these rituals might then be experienced by an audience. Particularly in representations of folk customs, there have been few if any critical or embodied approaches to filming that highlight the inter-relationship between filmmaker, subjects, film and audience in the creation of meaning, imagining certain senses of place through the folk traditions and their transformation into filmic space.

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<sup>90</sup> In Rouch's *Les Maitres Fous* something of the broader context is provided through shots of nearby Accra where sect participants live and work, and political questions are raised regarding the rituals themselves through participants being possessed by spirits associated with Western Colonial powers. Much of Russell's work is set in Suriname where he spent time in the Peace Corps and got to know his subjects, allowing for the intimate perspectives apparent in his films, although more recent work is set elsewhere.

## Conclusion

This research and the filmic outcome have demonstrated many of the interesting possibilities that might emerge from a practice investigating place and ritual through embodied, performative, and auto-ethnographic approaches to film. I will return now by way of conclusion to briefly summarise the aims and objectives I set out to explore, before discussing in more detail what I found and learnt through this process.

This study centred around senses of place. My goal was to explore how places are sensed, imagined, and understood through the experiences of both the lived body and film's technological body. Using the framework of two performative folk rituals, I investigated the experiential qualities of these seasonal events for people who live in or travel back to Haxey and Padstow. I aimed to present these experiences in the wider context of the localities where the traditions take place, and framed them as performative acts that might generate certain senses of home and belonging. My research focused on a phenomenological approach, through which I asserted, following Ingold, it is through dynamically being in the world that it is known and understood. To draw close to the lived experiences of others, I explored embodied movements and performances in the landscape during the rituals and at other times through my own lived experiences and those of the film's body.

From the outset, I recognised that film does not simply convey lived experience to an audience but distorts and *re*-presents. The central goal of the research was thus to investigate the empirical possibilities of encounters *between* filmmaker, film, subjects, and audience. I foregrounded my own intervention in the filmmaking process through focusing on performance, auto-ethnography, and experimental ethnographic research techniques. To re-iterate, I was primarily interested in the interplay film offers between meaning and being. On the one hand I aimed to draw close to the lived experiences of others, and on the other, my goal was equally to pull apart, fragment, and question. This was a means through which to engage with the problems and politics of documentary filmmaking.

Through the process of the research, I uncovered certain perceptions and realities of life in Padstow and Haxey for local communities and for those who travel back. I learnt about the significance of the rituals and broader senses of place for people I

met during interviews and informal conversations, and through my own bodily experiences and encounters at the events over many years. In both places, these performative acts in the landscape, in their own distinctive ways, were confirmed to be means through which senses of belonging and community are fostered, imagined, and renewed each year. The rituals resonate on both personal and collective levels. They are for many the most significant day of the year, and are a way to remember family and friends who have passed away, many who had once participated themselves. Their affective power can be sensed by an audience in my film through images, the voices of locals, and the emotion conveyed as they speak about the rituals.

The 'truths' presented in this research are recognised as partial ones. There are other opinions of the traditions that are not expressed here. I included voices in the film that described commonly held viewpoints, backed up by my research, but there were others who suggested different realities. In Haxey, for example, newer residents do not always take part in the Hood. Some young men are afraid to participate in case injury prevents them from working and paying their mortgages. In Padstow, while most 'locals' take part and revere their tradition, there are many different levels of participation, and some who feel left out on the day due to the hierarchical nature of the events. One man I met, for example, an avid 'May-er', no longer took part. He felt pushed out by the Blue Ribbon 'Oss as a younger generation moved up and did not respect the more senior members. Neither tradition involved an entirely harmonious bringing together of the whole community on the day. There was not space in this thesis to explore fully the internal politics of both traditions, or the views of those who felt excluded, but I maintain awareness that the experiences I have presented are subjective and selective. They are performed through fragments of interviews and ritual actions, the product of transient moments in time.

As I watch back the film I have made now, I am presented with a piece of work that both closely resembles and reminds me of my experiences 'in the field', and something entirely different and transformed. Returning to Clifford, ethnography is a process of creating "serious fictions." It was through the possibilities film offered me to both transmit lived experience, and to disrupt and reflect upon this process, that I was able to tentatively uncover and explore these "partial truths". In this way I was also able to present them as such, transparently to an audience. The ritual

experiences and wider senses of place are animated in the film through the combination of voice, texture, colour, sound, gesture, and movement. They offer opportunities for the viewer to share in the sensual qualities of certain moments in time. Yet they are heavily edited, distorted and transformed. Equally, a foregrounding of my own presence through the voice of a narrator was a means to explore the performative interplay between my own and others' bodies in the field. It was precisely through focusing on encounters, tensions and boundaries to experiences I gained the deepest insights into the rituals, and their significance in people's lives. The images of the couple who lived in Italy standing in front of my camera at the maypole, to provide one example, speak much of the complex contradictions at work when considering notions of home and belonging.

Aside from the empirical understandings of place and ritual gained in this research, much has been learnt about the nature and possibilities of documentary filmmaking. Through intense self-scrutiny, reflecting on film's body, and exploring the interconnections between the bodily experiences of subjects, filmmaker, film and audience, my practice deepened and unfolded in new ways.

Through the approaches I took and choices made in production, an audience viewing my film is required to actively reach out to make meaning through their own bodily experiences. Returning once more to Jennifer Barker's example of Tarkovsky's *Mirror*, I re-iterate film's affective capacity to move and evoke physical responses. She sees the emotion in the film as being, "inextricably bound up with motion and materiality", recognising that it is not only the characters capable of evoking strong emotions of "love, desire, nostalgia and joy", but also the film itself. This comes about through film's bodily presence and intentions, which the viewer then participates in too (2009:1-2). The embodied techniques I use in my own film, and the foregrounding of surface texture, are likewise ones the audience then engages with through their own bodies to make meaning.

Barker describes how the medium is capable of affecting the body of the viewer on many different levels, from the surface of the skin to complete immersion. Film conceived in this way can evoke a whole array of embodied themes, such as "caressing, striking, startling, pummelling, grasping, embracing, pushing, pulling,

palpation, immersion, and inspiration.” (2009:3). Some of these adjectives could easily now be applied to describe the content of my finished film, demonstrating the many possibilities that emerge from haptic and tactile approaches. At times, for example, my camera caresses and embraces the world through certain close-up shots of nature, by conveying small details of everyday life and the rituals, and through the continual desire to draw close. The film also pushes, pulls and grasps, perhaps best demonstrated by the local man’s footage within the sway in Haxey. There is a raw, visceral quality to the images due to the camera being attached to the man’s body as he is jostled around and struggles with his teammates that conveys the intensity of lived experience in those moments. I would also have liked to have attached a similar camera to the ‘Oss itself in Padstow to glimpse the perspective of a man whirling around, and experiencing local landscapes through dizzying perspectives, allowing for audience empathy and imagination. Yet this study has been as much about boundaries and limits to experience as shared ones, so the absence of this kind of imagery is in itself a valuable form of commentary on the politics of place and filmmaking.

Through my manipulating certain images, the film also at times arguably startles and immerses the audience. As the re-filmed shots flicker on the screen during the ritual sections, for instance, they surprise and unsettle the viewer. At other times, in Padstow as the May song slows down and the ritual footage becomes more abstract, the audience is briefly immersed in the dream-like images and sounds, and a kind of ‘intensification’ of experience comes about as previously explored in relation to Maya Deren’s discussions on the use of poetry in film.

All of these tactile forms and techniques are ones that elicit new forms of understanding on the nature of cinematic representation. This is achieved not through realist representation, but by foregrounding film’s own bodily movements and materiality.

The embodied techniques I used were themselves adopted as forms of experimental ethnography in my research. They were seen as forms of performativity, through which the self and my subjective intentions were written into the work at every stage. Likewise, other experimental ethnographic techniques such as the use of a

fictionalised narrator were also means through which to eschew and question documentary realism. Returning to Catherine Russell, the production of otherness only exists as a fantasy (1999:6), and “ethnographic truth...is a realism that is conditional on the fragmented and transient present.” (8). In my work, it is through the narrator reflexively looking back over time and reflecting on her images that this break in time, this fantasy, is highlighted and explored. Sitney wrote that, “it is the autobiographical cinema *per se* that confronts fully the rupture between the time of cinema and the time of experience and invents forms to contain what it finds there.” (1978, in Russell, 1999: 280). Just as folk traditions are suggested to be an imaginative form of time travel, so too the auto-ethnographic nature of my film comprises an imaginative journey “in memory and history”. (Russell, 1999: 281).

Despite self-awareness and transparency in the work, through performativity and experimental ethnography, power relations are always present in documentary filmmaking. By using footage shot within the sway by a local man, alongside voices of locals, I went some way to democratising the representational process, yet the film was ultimately shaped through my own subjectivity. Returning to the recent exhibition ‘Collective Observations: Folklore and Photography – *from Benjamin Stone to Flickr*’, as previously stated, the show ended by highlighting the wealth of amateur representations of these kind of events produced every year through mobile phone footage or small cameras, many then posted on Facebook or social media sites. Some of these were on display to demonstrate “the collective ownership of representation” of folk customs today<sup>91</sup>. These images, however, were then incorporated into the broader narratives of the show, subject to the framing of the curator, just as my own film, the voices I use, and the footage I obtained shot by a man with a hidden camera, was sculpted by my own subjective stance.

The places my work is screened and the kinds of responses that emerge from those new encounters will then themselves also form part of the complex web of meaning connecting filmmaker, film, subjects, and then finally audience, together. I intend to screen the film in both Padstow and Haxey, and responses to the piece will be particularly revealing. Locals will recognise their own experiences within the film,

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<sup>91</sup> I quote here from the text accompanying this screen in the gallery.

and yet also their expectations will no doubt be shaped by past representations of the rituals and mainstream documentary conventions. I am reminded here of Bunuel's ethnographic film *Las Hurdes* (1933). The film's surrealistic handling of its subject matter disrupts expectation. Focusing around the Hurdanos, a destitute population living in a remote part of Spain, its sarcastic and blunt use of voiceover, and its lack of sympathy for the people portrayed, profoundly shocks. The film is ambiguous and uncomfortable, yet it succeeds, as Russell acknowledges, in its "transgressions of the humanist mode of colonialist ethnography." (1999:29). I do not mean to suggest that my own work is so abrasive, bold or disrespectful, but to raise questions about cinematic representation requires a departure from realism that might be uncomfortable for some.

While I maintained awareness of ethics at every stage of the filmmaking process, some locals may feel their own understandings of the rituals is lost through my female narrative that relies heavily on my own subjective experiences. Folk traditions are, after all, understood by many as collective performances, by and for the people who partake, and here their meanings have been considered anew through different perspectives. In Padstow too, where boundaries and politics are so evident, and yet have largely remained invisible in representations of the events, locals may feel uncomfortable in having some of the conservatism, as well as the liberating individualism, of the rituals mirrored back to them.

Responses to the work will themselves therefore comprise new forms of bodily encounter. I believe they will contain further insights into the politics of place, ritual, and contemporary narratives surrounding folk customs. And they will also reflect current documentary conventions, particularly in relation to British folk traditions today. I return briefly to consider Elizabeth Edward's discussion of Benjamin Stone's influence on subsequent historical representations of folk traditions discussed in Chapter 3 (2012:250-251). A privileging of romantic representations of folk culture has largely prevailed through photography on this subject to the present day. Many of these same romantic expectations seem to continue to endure and pervade film too. Many people, both local and non-local, want to believe in the romantic and cohesive aspects of the rituals. To change and transform and distort folk customs might for many be considered inappropriate. And yet by ignoring the influence of filmmaker



(and the politics of place) in the creation of meaning, film once more slips into a romantic salvage paradigm, sidesteps any considerations of the politics of representation, and makes false claims to documentary 'truths'. While creating a film deeply infused with subjectivity may be problematic for some, equally problematic for me would be a lack of reflexivity and critical voice.

Given more time to develop the research further in new directions, it would be interesting to document and explore more the kinds of reactions the film evokes. Jean Rouch incorporated audience responses into his seminal film *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961), by filming interviewees' reactions to the work. It would certainly be interesting to film people's feelings about the work in Padstow and Haxey, and incorporate those into a subsequent investigation, once more in dialogue with my own observations. Just as my research foregrounds something of embodied experience *a priori* other meanings, so too this would involve filming audience members, their faces, gestures, and emotional responses to the work, as well as verbal explanations, to convey meaning through embodiment and language. Christian Jankowski conducts a similar filmic enquiry in *What Remains*. (2004), in which people who have just emerged from a cinema screening express their emotional responses to the film in front of a fixed camera. We are not told the name of the film or the nature of the story, but are confronted instead by emotional reactions, and reminded of film's capacity to evoke powerful embodied responses. Enquiries along these lines were beyond the scope of this research, but would be a means to extend my embodied enquiries further in relation to audience, and add new layers of meaning to the research.

On another level, there are various artist filmmakers who have in recent years made created work in which a ritual experience is not documented but invented entirely. Jeremy Deller, for example, instigated a street parade of his own with a brass band through Manchester (*Procession*, 2009), and re-staged the 1984 miner's strike in South Yorkshire in *Battle of Orgreave* (2001). Ben Rivers imagined a post-apocalyptic world where a tribe living on a remote island, appear dressed in strange ritual masks in *Slow Action* (2010). In Adam Chodzko's *Pyramid* (2008), set in the future, residents of Folkestone invent a ritual to lift the fabricated curse of the 'pyramid inversion', an architectural feature that is said to have brought bad luck to the town. One of the

questions or areas I would be interested in would be a further exploration of ritual and place in a fictional context. Many of the questions relevant to this study, such as the role of place and ritual in today's world, and performative relationships to the landscape, could be explored in different ways through imagining new rituals for our current times. If a folk tradition were set in a fictionalised place and time, there would be a certain freedom from the responsibilities and politics of documentary filmmaking. Questions could be explored regarding ritual and place through pure acts of imagining. Fiction film, however, raises its own questions, and a different politics of representation, that would still need addressing. To return to my research interests, it is the reflexive use of the medium that interests me, and the transformations that occur within that process, rather than film simply documenting an external occurrence, whether real or fictional.

For this reason I identify with the aspirations of *Plan For a Spell* (2001), in which Adam Chodzko goes further in his invention of ritual to demonstrate the ritualistic powers of technology in itself. In this piece, he presents footage shot around Britain via a DVD programmed to show sequences of the footage in a random order. By allowing technology to independently re-present the work in different ways, he playfully suggests the possibility of an underlying, mystical formula within the footage that might release a spell if shown in a certain order. What is particularly appealing about this work conceptually is the foregrounding of film itself as an act of myth-making, that contains affinities with my own work. In this case the piece only exists through the technology generating it, which is integral to meaning.

Despite an interest in fiction and invention in my work and beyond, I return finally to consider my research as still very much grounded in social realities. I believe its strength lies precisely in focusing on film's body and the intervention of technology, but always in relation too to lived experience, and the politics of representation. In this respect, the work goes beyond Chodzko's intentions.

In my film I reflect upon place, belonging and ritual as performed and imagined by local communities and through my own experiences. It is suggested that it is in part due to the nature of contemporary life, its transience and the impersonal forces of globalism, that ritual is so appealing. The narrator's own being drawn to the rituals is

framed partly as fantasy, a projection of her own desires for meaning, and a search for the uncanny, or deeper pagan forces in the landscape. But by the end of her journey, it is finally suggested that it is the filmmaking itself that satisfies this thirst, in which she finds depth, meaning, and transformation. It is not just the folk and their rituals that compel her, but the folk *in her machine*.

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*Cobra Mist.* (2008) Directed by Emily Richardson [16mm projection].

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*Correspondence: Jonas Mekas - JL Guerín.* (2011) Directed by Jonas Mekas and José Luis Guerín [digital projection].

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*Handsworth Songs.* (1986) Directed by John Akomfrah. Black Audio Film Collective [video: DVD].

*Hangway Turning.* (1990) Directed by Philip Sanderson [digital file, British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection, Central St. Martins].

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*Here's a Health to the Barley Mow.* (1952) Produced by English Folk Dance and Song Society. Reproduced by BFI on 'Here's a Health to the Barley Mow', 2011 [video: DVD].

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*The Houseless Shadow.* (2011) Directed by William Raban [digital projection].

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*Kranky Klaus.* (2002-3) Directed by Cameron Jamie. London: Artangel [digital projection].

*Landscape Suicide.* (1986) Directed by James Benning. Österreichischen Filmmuseum, 2011 [Video: DVD].

*Let Each One Go Where He May.* (2009) Directed by Ben Russell [Digital projection].

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*London.* (1994) Directed by Patrick Keiller. London: BFI [video: DVD].

*London Orbital: A Walk around the M25* (2002) Directed by Chris Petit and Iain Sinclair. London: Illuminations [video: DVD].

*Lumps of Plum Pudding and Pieces of Pie.* (2009) Directed by Matthew Cowan [digital projection].

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*Man of Aran.* (1934) Directed by Robert Flaherty. UK: Park Circus, 2012 [video: DVD].

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*Mirror.* (1975) Directed by Andrei Tarkovsky [35mm projection].

*Modern Life.* (2008) Directed by Raymond Depardon. London: Soda Pictures [video: DVD].



*My Winnipeg* (2008) Directed by Guy Maddin. London: Soda Pictures [digital projection].

*Naked Spaces, Living is Round* (1985) Directed by Trinh T. Minh Ha. New York: Women Make Movies [video: DVD].

*Nanook of the North.* (1922) Directed by Robert Flaherty. Criterion [video: DVD].

*News From Home.* (1977) Directed by Chantal Akerman– USA: World Artists [video: VHS].

*The Nuer.* (1971) Directed by Robert Gardner. Film Study Center at Harvard University [video: VHS].

*9 Muses* (2010). Directed by John Akomfrah. London: New Wave Films [digital projection].

*Oh Death How Nourishing You Are.* (1972-3) Directed by Margaret Raspe [Super 8].

*The Origin of the Night: Amazon Cosmos.* (1973-77). Directed by Lothar Baumgarten. [16mm projection].

*Origin of the Species.* (2008) Directed by Ben Rivers [16mm projection].

*Oss Oss Wee Oss.* (1953) Directed by Alan Lomax. Reproduced by BFI on 'Here's a Health to the Barley Mow', 2011 [video: DVD].

*Patience (After Sebald).* (2012) Directed by Grant Gee [digital projection].

*Perestroika* (2009) Directed by Sarah Turner [digital projection].

*Plan for a Spell.* (2001) Directed by Adam Chodzko [digital projection].

*Portrait of Ga.* (1952) Directed by Margaret Tait. Reproduced by LUX on 'Margaret Tait: selected films, 1952-1976' [video: DVD].

*Procession.* (2009) Directed by Jeremy Deller [digital projection].

*Psyche.* (1947) Directed by Gregory Markopoulos [digital projection].

*Pyramid.* (2008) Directed by Adam Chodzko

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*La Region Centrale*. (1971) Directed by Michael Snow [16mm projection].

*Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania*. (1972) Directed by Jonas Mekas [digital projection].

*Requiem for a Village* (1975) Directed by David Gladwell. BFI Flipside [video: DVD].

*Ritual in Transfigured Time*. (1946) Directed by Maya Deren. On 'Maya Deren: Dance Films'. Paris: Re:Voir video [video: DVD].

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*Robinson in Ruins*. (2010) Directed by Patrick Keiller [video: DVD].

*Robinson in Space*. (1997) Directed by Patrick Keiller [video: DVD].

*Sans Soleil*. (1983) Directed by Chris Marker [35mm projection].

*Self-Made* (2010). Directed by Gillian Wearing [digital projection].

*Shadow of a Journey*. (1980) Directed by Tina Keane [digital file, British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection, Central St. Martins].

*Sleep Furiously*. (2008) Directed by Gideon Koppel [digital projection].

*Slow Action*. (2010) Directed by Ben Rivers [16mm projection].

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*Spare Time*. (1939) Directed by Humphrey Jennings. Reproduced by BFI on 'The complete Humphrey Jennings: volume one: the first days', 2011 [video: DVD].

*Stone*. (2008) Directed by Roz Cran [digital projection].

*Sunday in Peking.* (1956). Directed by Chris Marker. [35mm film].

*Surname Viet Given Name Nam.* (1989) Directed by Trinh T. Minh Ha New York: Women Make Movies [video: DVD].

*Swandown.* (2012) Directed by Andrew Kotting [digital projection].

*Taking my Skin.* (2006) Directed by Sarah Pucill. San Francisco: Canyon Cinema [video: DVD].

*Thames Film.* (1986) Directed by William Raban [16mm projection].

*This is My Land.* (2006) Directed by Ben Rivers [16mm projection].

*The Ties That Bind.* (1984) Directed by Su Friedrich. New York: Outcast films. [video: DVD].

*Torres Strait Footage.* (1989) Shot by Alfred C. Haddon during the 1898 Cambridge Expedition to the Torres Strait. BFI [35mm, BFI archive].

*Trance and Dance in Bali.* (1952) Directed by Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead. PA: WorldCat.Org [Video: DVD].

*Trio A* (1966). Directed by Yvonne Rainer [digital projection].

*Trypps Number Three.* (2006) Directed by Ben Russell [<https://vimeo.com/6975800>. Last viewed 23.04.13].

*Trypps Number Seven* (Badlands). (2010) Directed by Ben Russell [<https://vimeo.com/29406623>. Last viewed 23.04.13].

*Twice a Man.* (1963) Directed by Gregory Markopoulos [digital projection].

*Two Years At Sea.* (2011) Directed by Ben Rivers [35mm projection].

*Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives.* (2010) Directed by Apichatpong Weerasethakul [35mm projection].

*Valtos.* (1987) Directed by Patrick Keiller [digital file, British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection, Central St. Martins].

*Wake up and Dance* (1950) Directed by Alan Simpson. Reproduced by BFI on 'Here's a Health to the Barley Mow', 2011 [video: DVD].

*Way of the Morris* (2011) Directed by Tim Plester and Rob Curry [digital projection].

*Water Wrackets.* (1975) Directed by Peter Greenaway [digital file, British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection, Central St. Martins].

*We, the Normal.* (1988) Directed by George Kuchar [digital projection].

*What the Water Said.* (series 1-3) (1997-98) Directed by David Gatten [16mm projection].

*What Remains.* (2004) Directed by Christian Jankowski. [16mm projection].

*The Wicker Man.* (1973) Directed by Robin Hardy. London: Warner Home Video, 2002 [video: DVD].

*Yanqui Walker and the Optical Revolution* (2009). Directed by Katherine Ramey [digital projection].

*Yellow Patch.* (2011) Directed by Zarina Bhimji [digital projection].

*Zors Lemma.* (1970) Directed by Hollis Frampton [digital projection].

## APPENDIX - Log of Interviews

Name	Date	Location	Length of interview (mins)
Robert England	03.10	mother's home (interviewee resident in Geneva).	80
Malcolm McCarthy	03.10	home, Padstow	75
John Buckingham	03.10	home, Padstow	110
Maureen Tatlow	03.10	mother's home, Padstow (interviewee resident in Wadebridge, Cornwall).	70
David Divian	04.10	mother's house	60
Chris McCarthy	04.10	home, Padstow	60
Anne Vivian	04.10	home, Padstow	95
Barry Kinsman	04.10	home, Padstow	75
Richard Poole	04.10	home, Devon	80
Faye Smith	04.10	home, Padstow	95
Sue Norfolk	04.10	home, Padstow	75
Ian Dawes	04.10	home, Padstow	100
Maria Knight	04.10	home, Trevone, Cornwall	50
Bill Lindsay	05.10	home, St. Issey, Cornwall	75
Tom Mooyaart	08.10	café, Amsterdam (interviewee resident in Amsterdam).	75
Matt Seaber	07.10	my house, London (interviewee resident in London).	115
Jamie McOwen	04.11	home, Padstow	85
Kelty Seaber	04.11	home, Padstow	105
Patrick Bate	04.11	home, Padstow	65
Tom Evans	04.11	mother's home, Padstow (interviewee resident in	55

		London).	
William Tucker	04.11	allotments, Padstow (interviewee resident in Padstow).	35
Eisleen Pearson	12.10	home, Haxey	75
Alan Holgate	12.10	mother's home, Haxey (interviewee resident in Haxey).	110
Helen Cooper	12.10	home, Westwoodside	65
Jean Millington	12.10	home, Haxey	70
Renee Brown	01.10	home, Scunthorpe	80
Stan Boor	01.10	home, Westwoodside	90
James Chatwin	01.11	Loco pub, Haxey (interviewee resident in Haxey)	75
Dale Smith	01.11	Loco pub, Haxey (interviewee resident in Westwoodside)	85
Ian Dawes	01.11	Loco pub, Haxey (interviewee resident near Doncaster).	55
Ian Thorpe	01.11	home, Haxey	110
Jeremy Cooper	01.11	work, near Doncaster (interviewee resident near Doncaster).	
Lewis Mann	01.11	Loco pub, Haxey	90
Laurence Walls	01.11	home, Haxey	65
Phil Coggon	01.11	home, Haxey	75
Rodney Harris	01.11	home, Haxey	60

